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AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2020

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# Time to get on with the job in hand – Brexit agreements

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



INSIDEYOUR SHEEPFARMER AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2020 VOL. 40 NO 3. ISSN 0141-2434

With five months of our lives almost exclusively dominated by Covid-19, we are gradually easing back towards focusing on the issues that we would, and should, have been spending far more time on.

Time waits for no one and it seems that neither will our final departure from the EU, nor our transition from the old CAP farm schemes to an as yet unknown outcome. Who knows what the outcome of these final stages of the Brexit discussions will be. Even the most optimistic of observers couldn't say that things are going well, with rounds of talks regularly breaking down early with serious and fundamental differences between the two sides.

Despite this, the weight of opinion still seems to fall on the side of something being agreed. Maybe not a deal, but an agreement of sorts that might carry us through until a deal is struck.

I hope this is the case and we must keep pushing for it because the alternative is no prettier now than it was in March or October 2019. Our sheep values are still highly dependent on trade with the EU and with still nowhere near enough opportunities elsewhere in the world, and little likelihood of our domestic market changing significantly, paying tariffs to get product into the EU is only going to have one influence.

## Tariffs

If they do become even just a short-term part of our future then tariffs will be paid by the importing agent, for example a French or German company. But for trade to work the tariff cost will trickle down and end up back at the start of the chain, to the payer who can't pass it on further. You've guessed it – the farmer.

The money may still not be on tariffs being enforced, particularly on agricultural products and food, but they do present a risk that undermines the stability that our sheep industry needs. 'Non-tariff' complications present similar concerns and there are a number of practicalities yet to be ironed out. There is every likelihood that they can

be resolved in time. Export health certificates appear to have been, however, while it may seem ridiculous, a new meat stamp and national identification code for Britain has yet to be agreed.

Then we have the new obstacle of Border Control Posts that will check goods going back and forth. This will be entirely new with new procedures and paperwork. While it's reasonable to think that, if the will is there, trade could be smooth and uninterrupted, it's also realistic to expect complications.

The success of the next few months' breeding and store sales is based on confidence and, with the uncertainty being politically and nationally driven, it's also reasonable that the Government give reassurances in the case of things going wrong.

## Reassurance

It has done just this throughout the Covid-19 crisis, but what is different here is that providing this reassurance now could go a long way to upholding that confidence and taking away the need for the Government intervention further down the road. Contingency plans are still in the drawer from 2019 and need to come out again soon.

Industry and the Government, and its agencies, all have to work hard during the next six months or so to avoid any pitfalls and make the forthcoming changes as smooth as possible.

It's worth reminding ourselves that we are the third largest exporter of sheepmeat globally. That's an impressive statistic given the size of Great Britain and it tells you several things.

We have the passion and skills required for sheep farming, as well as the climate, soils and the conditions for grassland farming to make it a suitable form of land management. We also have a post-farm supply chain that gets our high quality lamb and mutton to market efficiently.

This includes the auction marts, the abattoirs, processors, and exporters, as well as governments and related agencies that, despite what some may think, do mostly want our industry to succeed.

We have a lot of work to do, but we are still reasonably well positioned and our industry has many more strengths than it has weaknesses.

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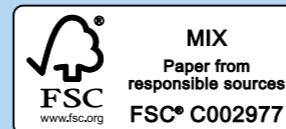
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# Join the first virtual AGM

NSA will be holding its AGM on Thursday 13th August 2020, at 10am. This will be the first time that NSA has held its AGM over the Internet, as it observes the Government's social distancing measures and is prioritising the safety of its members and staff.

NSA is excited to be using this new facility and hopes that more members will be encouraged to attend without having to take extra time away from their flocks.

The meeting agenda and link to register are available online and NSA is asking members to register as soon as possible for this meeting. Just visit the NSA website, click on the link and we will send the meeting invite. For those wishing to join, but who struggle with the technology, turn to page 12 for a step-by-step 'how to' guide to joining NSA's online meetings.

Members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form or by appointing 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 10am on Wednesday 12th August 2020.

For full details of the use and completion of proxy forms, please visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events) or call NSA Head Office.



The Ryland Society met in July.

## NSA barn available

With restrictions easing, NSA is now able to offer its barn conference area once more for limited numbers and reserves the right to reject a booking where the following rules cannot be guaranteed. Where weather allows, the yard is also available (provided you can bring your own folding chairs) with the barn open for toilets, teas, and coffees. Contact NSA Head Office for enquiries.

## Love Lamb Week returns for 2020

Love Lamb Week will return in September for another campaign of focused activity promoting the nutritional benefits and delicious taste of lamb.

For the past few years, the week-long campaign has been coordinated by AHDB with support from industry bodies, such as NSA and other levy boards. But 2020 will see AHDB, HCC, QMS and LMC work in collaboration to promote the campaign more effectively. NSA encourages members to engage in their own #LoveLamb promotion. Perhaps you could work with local businesses, such as butchers, farm shops or restaurants, to promote lamb or highlight the environmental credentials of lamb production via your own social media profiles? Whatever activity you take part in, be sure to include the hashtag #LoveLambWeek and tag @natsheep so NSA can see the fantastic efforts made by our members and supporters.

## Make use of the Countryside Code

With lockdown across the UK lifting, and people still enjoying the benefits and beauty of the great outdoors, there is no better time than now to refresh and help educate passing members of the public on the Countryside Code.

To access the updated countryside code visit [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code).



## Keep your contact details up to date

With many summer events cancelled, and alternative sessions being organised virtually, NSA would like to encourage members to ensure that their contact details are up to date in order to keep up with the latest offerings. Additionally, NSA sends its weekly email update every week on a Friday and sees this as a key tool, in keeping members abreast of sheep related news and updates.



Next Generation Ambassador Annie Carr shows her support for LoveLamb.

## NSA officeholders



**Lord Inglewood**  
Honorary President



**Bryan Griffiths**  
Chair of the Board



**David Gregory**  
Honorary Treasurer  
Finance & General Purposes Chairman



**Eddie Eastham**  
UK Policy & Technical Chairman



**Kevin Harrison**  
English Committee Chairman

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# NSA regional reports

## NSA Marches

By Katie James, Secretary

As some of the lockdown restrictions begin to ease, NSA Marches Region is looking forward to taking a tentative step towards a return to normality with a visit to Cotswold Seeds, Worcestershire, in the near future.

The original visit was planned for June, but we are now pleased to be in a position where we can look forward to an informative visit once again. The date for the visit will hopefully be confirmed soon, please look out for an email with details. The visit is likely to be limited to a smaller number of regional members, with places booked in advance, on a first-come-first-served basis.

It is now a couple of months since our regional members had their first Zoom meeting and, with the whole world seemingly having taken to this online platform to continue with business, we are now hoping the next meeting on Tuesday 28th July at 7pm will be full of Zoom experts. If any regional members would like to add items to the meeting agenda, please do contact me.

## South West

By Ian May, Manager

Despite everything that has happened this year, it is great to see that the South West Ram Sale is still going ahead at Exeter Livestock Market on Wednesday 19th August. There looks to be in the region of 650 rams, across 12 breeds, on offer, which I'm sure will provide something for everyone.

As I write there is still a requirement, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, that only active purchasers attend the sale, and for them to be registered with Kivells before the day. Please get in touch with them on 01392 251 261 or via email to [livestock@kivells.com](mailto:livestock@kivells.com) to register or for further clarification. Catalogues are available on both the Kivells and NSA websites or can be requested directly from Sue Martyn.

## Central

By Rose Smyth, Secretary

All at Central Region hope that members are doing well and have managed to get their sheep shorn.

In the current circumstances, maintaining a normal balance has been challenging, and things seem to be changing weekly, or even daily, relating to what's happening with Covid-19. We hope members haven't been too adversely affected and we are hopefully heading in the right direction. That said, Central Region is planning its next committee meeting at the end of August and, depending on what the Government guidelines allow, we hope it might even be in person at the Travellers Rest, in Brough. If anyone wishes to attend please could they let me know in advance.



Northern Region is busy planning for North Sheep next year.

## Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

The Northern Region Committee has managed to keep functioning in these challenging times by holding a meeting via Zoom, which did the job and facilitated necessary discussion. If nothing else, it was a chance to see someone different, even if it was on a computer screen.

This led to a meeting being held with the Defra ELM Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Team. ELM's Acting Deputy Director Rebecca Clutterbuck gave a presentation followed by a Q&A session. Both the members and Rebecca found the discussions useful, with constructive conversation taking place. Although many of the answers remain vague, it did feel like there is a genuine intention to drive forward for the greater good of both farmer and the environment. We must not be complacent and further communications are hoped for because there are many decisions still to be made about various details of the proposed scheme.

We're working on NSA North Sheep 2021 and the major sponsors have now been announced as Hexham and Northern Marts (pictured). Discussions are starting to take place around various sponsorship packages, and it is hoped that the online stand booking service will be open in the autumn. An organising committee is being formed and they may be able to meet face to face by the autumn.

## Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

Lambs have been reaching slaughter weights ahead of 2019's performance and who would have thought that prices would return to acceptable levels so soon after the drop in prices at the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown?

Most sheep farmers are monitoring lambs weekly and making sure to keep fit lambs moving because we do worry, in the back of our minds, that with Brexit uncertainty things could take an unexpected turn at any time.

After a partial closedown due to Covid-19, our committee needs to get down to some serious business as we have a sheep event to run in 2021. We feel that a change of venue would add a renewed spark to the event, and we are currently looking at various venues and options. This will bring a new challenge as we all knew the format after having run the event in the same place for several years. When we have chosen a venue, we will be contacting trade and breed societies with the details in the hope that they will support us in the usual fashion.

## South East

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

As the country continues to adapt to changes imposed by Covid-19, we too will adapt and embrace the technology although it will be with some trepidation, and by the time you read this, we will have held our first virtual committee meeting.

Our first round of field days, due to be held in June 2020, had to be cancelled due to the lockdown restrictions. We had hoped to hold the second round in September but, after consultation with sponsors and hosts, the difficult decision was made to cancel these days too. We remain optimistic that these events will be held in 2021 and are grateful to our sponsors and hosts for their continuing commitment. Members across the region are busy shearing and after the dry spell the recent rain was welcome and will have boosted grass growth at just the right time. We sincerely hope that everyone keeps safe and well in what continue to be challenging times.

## Scotland

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

As you all may be aware, the annual Kelso Ram Sales have been the latest victim of Covid-19.

This is certainly a disappointing outcome for everyone involved, but we would like to thank the Border Union trustees and Ram Sales committee for all their efforts in the lead up to this difficult decision. Please keep an eye out for all other opportunities to trade rams and the IAAS member auction markets. It has arranged sales in lieu of Kelso.

The shearing season is underway and, with the good weather, lambs have also been thriving. As we start to emerge from lockdown, please remember to keep safe on the farm and when out and about.

It is hard to believe that we're more than halfway through 2020 and no one could have envisaged how it would be spent. We're all looking forward to seeing our members in person again, as and when it is safe to do so, but, in the meantime, do not be afraid to pick up the phone and keep talking. Your voice and opinions are important, and we feel that the initiation of regional advisory groups are the best way forward for member engagement.



Cymru/Wales Region has set its Welsh Sheep date.

## Cymru/Wales

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

Since writing the previous report we have started to ease out of lockdown and an air of normality has returned, and although the autumn sales will continue we will have to abide by social distancing rules, which continue to be different across the devolved regions.

Trade has remained strong for the first half of the year. But with Brexit talks now coming to the fore we are in the same situation as we were in 2019, with our future unknown and not able to plan. Let us hope we will have more certainty as autumn draws nearer.

Plans for NSA Welsh sheep will start to take shape in the coming months, so please put the 18th May 2021 in the diary now, for an event not to be missed.

## Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

We are pleased to announce the confirmed dates of our ram sales taking place in August and September. Our first will take place at Rugby on Friday 28th August, 2020, and the sale at Melton Mowbray will take place on the revised date of Friday 18th September, 2020.

It is wonderful to be able to work once again with both groups of auctioneers to keep our ram sales going despite this year's challenges. Both have worked extremely hard to make the sales happen. But we must remain aware there will still be constraints and social distancing rules in place at all times and we ask everyone who is planning to attend to remain alert and conscientious of others throughout.



Eastern Region Ram Sales are still going ahead.

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Speak to Helen Roberts. See page 2 for contact details.

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# Webinars keep members connected – and informed – during lockdown

Webinars have always been a great way to share information and views with 'remote' delegates.

But they've become an even more popular – and essential – means to enable knowledge transfer since the start of the Covid-19 lockdown in March. NSA has teamed up with a number of organisations in recent months to bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise – from a selection of the UK's leading vets, animal health specialists, researchers, industry gurus and sheep farmers – direct to NSA members, in the comfort of their own homes. Read on and see if you need to book yourself a front-row seat for the next series of webinars. [To catch up on any webinars you may have missed please head to \[nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars\]\(http://nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars\).](#)

## Lameness webinar focused on CODD

Lameness in sheep is one of the most significant welfare concerns affecting the national flock.

While much focus is given to foot rot, Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD) has become an increasing cause of lameness in sheep.

With this in mind, NSA hosted a webinar on this topic in June. This attracted more than 100 attendees, with many more people catching up with the recording online.

NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths, and his wife Liz, were joined by industry experts Jennifer Duncan, from Liverpool University, and CODD specialist and sheep vet Liz Nabb.

### Practical

"The webinar was clearly a resounding success with relatable, practical discussions that lasted for 90 minutes," says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker.

"And we have been pleased to already receive some excellent feedback from participants who found the session extremely valuable."

One delegate said: "This was an excellent webinar. I'm really glad it was made available to non-members, but it has also made me consider joining the NSA now – and I think that many others will also consider joining." Retired sheep

vet and ex-president of the Sheep Veterinary Society, Julian Earl, also reviewed the webinar.

"The webinar on CODD was comprehensive and interesting and, no doubt, extremely useful for those struggling with this challenging cause of lameness in our flocks.

The session was well-illustrated with numerous photographs of the lesions at various stages, both before and after treatments. The presentation was also systematic and had a step-by-step approach to the disease. Delegates were first introduced to the farmer's perspective, via Liz and Bryan Griffiths who have been struggling to manage the problem in their large flock. "They said that, once identified, it is relatively easy to treat on an individual basis. The high-risk areas were found to be where the sheep congregate: at feed troughs, gateways, feeders and water troughs. They thought that liming these areas helped to control the disease."

Following this was the perspective from research, presented by Jennifer Duncan. Along with history of the disease, she demonstrated the difficulties in identifying the bacterial cause in the first place and the epidemiology.

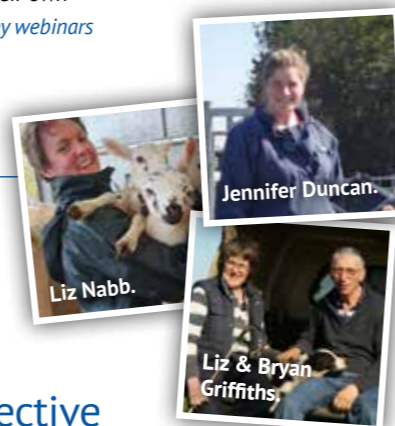
"Research shows that 35% of farms reported CODD with nearly half having bought the disease in. And work at University of Liverpool

is currently aiming to unravel the aetiology further."

### Perspective

Next came the veterinary perspective, presented by Liz Nabb, who looked at the treatment options. "As a bacterial condition, antibiotic therapy is critical to protect the welfare of the animals with this painful condition. But today the use of widespread antibiotics must be prudent and carefully considered. Responsible use was the key phrase here." "Whole-flock treatment cannot be justified. It may eliminate clinical disease, but there is a high chance of recurrence at a later date." There was a necessarily limited discussion of treatment choices, but it was emphasised several times that because antibiotic resistance is a global concern, the widespread use must be balanced against the issue of animal welfare in this condition. Prevention is undoubtedly better by limiting the risk factors.

"I learnt a lot and can recommend this format of knowledge transfer to anyone wishing to be enlightened about various topics relating to both the sheep and agricultural industry," adds Mr Earl.



An example of CODD.

"I really enjoy NSA's webinars. They help me keep up my knowledge related to sheep management and, at the same time, my English. They are well organised and are easy to connect to."

Leyla Ríos de Alvarez, from Bogotá-Colombia

## Taking the guesswork out of parasite control

NSA, Elanco and Moredun Institute have recently teamed up to deliver two webinars on 'Sustainable Parasite Control: Test don't Guess', which were aimed at farmers and animal health professionals.

"This webinar was presented by a selection of great speakers," says SCOPS Chair and NSA Eastern Region Chairman Kevin Harrison. "NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker delivered a stark warning of how poor parasite control affects the profitability and the sustainability of sheep enterprises and Moredun's Dave Bartley gave

delegates an informative presentation on testing and monitoring, which included a video of the larvae that can do so much damage to our flock's health. This also highlighted the danger of anthelmintic resistance in sheep worms.

"Dave stressed the importance of testing for resistance and having the best protocols in place to prevent the build up of resistance."

Kevin added that Elanco's Matt Colston then shared a detailed look into how to use the right treatments at the right time, including information on using faecal egg counts, lamb growth rates, grazing management, quarantine treatments, and

the benefits of building up a good picture of the worm activity on each individual farm.

"The webinar was such a success, with so many questions, that we followed it up with a small question-and-answer recording as an add on," says Kevin. "Both webinars are available to watch online. And I'd like to thank everyone who worked so hard to ensure that these webinars ran smoothly."

The next webinar, planned for the 5th August, will focus on liver fluke.

[To find out more and to register for the webinar, visit: \[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/\]\(http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/\)](#)



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Grassland management was the focus on a webinar with NSA and CIEL.

## Improving grassland management and forage efficiency

Grassland was the focus when NSA came together with Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL) to host a webinar.

There were presentations from NSA's Phil Stocker, CIEL's Mark Young, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute's (AFBI) Debbie McConnell, and Germinal's Helen Mathieu. And after each one Liz Genever chaired questions to the presenter.

Phil Stocker began by providing context on grassland in the UK, reminding delegates that 66% of agricultural land is grassland. He emphasised the need for increased productivity and profitability, given the focus on environmental and public goods, carbon sequestration, and health and well-being.

Mark Young followed, explaining the work carried out by CIEL and the various innovation projects that it is involved in. These include genetics, feed efficiency, product qualities, environmental impact, and health and welfare. The aim of all the projects is to increase sustainability.

Next up was Debbie McConnell, a dairy grassland researcher in NI working for the

AFBI. Debbie explained that there is significant potential to improve performance on livestock farms, with the starting point being recording grassland productivity. This provides the opportunity to create a baseline across the farm and to identify variability in paddock performance. It's then easier to work out which fields need attention, such as lime or reseeding. It also improves the management of grass supply throughout the grazing season to achieve target grazing covers and assessing grass utilisation.

### Potential

Debbie went on to explain more about GrassCheckGB, a project that involves 50 dairy, beef and sheep farms. It aims to provide a detailed understanding of actual and potential grass growth across Britain and identify key drivers behind better grass growth and utilisation. GrassCheckGB is also seeking to validate the Northern Ireland grass growth prediction model for British regions. Dr McConnell explained how to calculate grass supply and demand (see box).

The final presentation was given by



Germinal's Helen Mathieu, who shared information about alternative forages to help improve resilience to the UK's ever-changing weather patterns. She focused on the benefits of brassicas, as well as herbs and legumes, including plantain, chicory, red clover and Lucerne. She also talked about the establishment and conservation of each ley. The webinar was a great success, attracting viewers and listeners from across the UK and abroad.

Liz Genever is hosting a follow-up evening, talking to sheep farmer Rhys Edwards, from Bridgend in South Wales, and beef and sheep farmer Aled Evans, from Carmarthen, about their experiences of using GrassCheck during the past two grazing seasons.

There will be a particular focus on how they have used the information during the dry spring and summer to help them plan their grazing management. There will be a discussion on what else is needed to help them improve their grassland utilisation.

To register for this event please head to [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

Grass **DEMAND** is the total amount of grass the flock will consume each day  
**DEMAND** = Number of ewes x daily grass dry matter intake per ewe (kg)

Grass **SUPPLY** is the total amount of grass growth across the grazing platform each day  
**SUPPLY** = Daily grass growth rate (kgDM/ha) x area of grazing platform (ha)

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**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.**  
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**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 - Builth Wells - **CANCELLED**

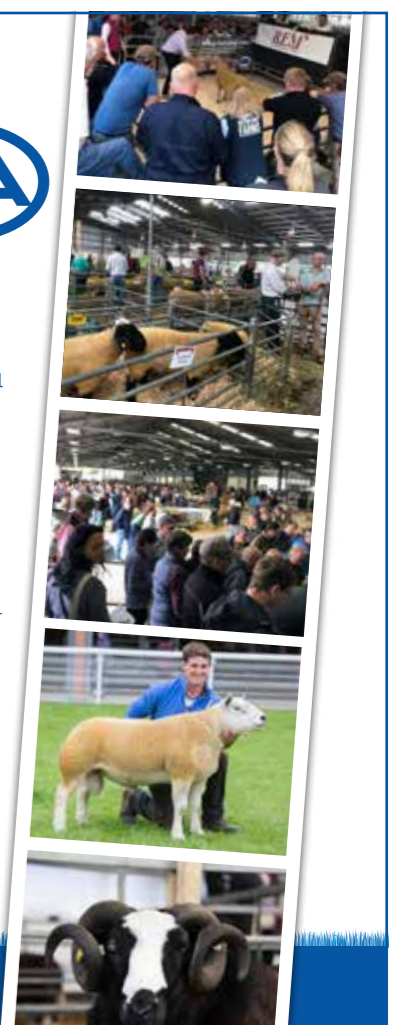
**NSA South West Ram Sale**  
 Wednesday 19th August - Exeter Livestock Market

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

**NSA Eastern Region Melton Mowbray Ram Sale**  
 Friday 18th September - Melton Mowbray Market

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

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



# NSA launches first 'Virtual celebration of sheep farming'

This should have been a summer of celebration for NSA, marking 40 years since our flagship show, NSA Sheep Event, was first held in the wonderful setting of the Three Counties Showground, near Malvern in Worcestershire.

Yet, as events and agricultural shows have all experienced up and down the country and indeed across the world, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has meant that NSA's face-to-face celebrations will be put on ice for the time being.

However, in recognition of the desire of our members and supporters to partake in ongoing developments and knowledge transfer, NSA has decided to proceed with some aspects of our events that people know and enjoy with a series of two-day 'virtual' events, starting this August.

The 'Virtual celebration of sheep farming' will provide sheep farmers with the opportunity to log in to a new and exciting NSA website – from the comfort and convenience of their own homes – to join online seminars (webinars) and workshops, browse interactive videos from trade and breed society stands, enter competitions, and more.

Each event is themed relevant to the season and the tasks that farmers might be undertaking

or policy that could be affecting us all at that time.

## Opportunity

NSA is excited to kick off the series with the first event titled 'Breeding the best' on Wednesday 12th and Thursday 13th August. This is a theme that will allow NSA-affiliated breed societies the opportunity to share information at a time when many farmers will be considering their plans for the upcoming breeding season.

Advice and guidance will also be delivered by a packed webinar timetable, where NSA is pleased to be supported once again by leading names from industry including AHDB, Ceva Animal Health, MSD and Elanco. Webinars will be open to everyone to join, with free registration available in advance and on the two days of the events.

As visitors to previous NSA events will know, we welcome a huge range of trade stand exhibitors to our usual events, and this unique opportunity to view new products and demonstrations, specifically focussed on the sheep sector, will still be on offer as our exhibitors share information with visitors through their own dedicated area of the website.

Those with a competitive nature will be able to get involved in a series of competitions that can be entered before and during the event, giving you a chance to win an array of prizes.

Competitions will include: a fleece competition, managed by long standing NSA supporters British Wool; a photography competition; a carcase competition and breed society stand contests (please see page 12 for how to enter).

"All at NSA were incredibly disappointed to cancel our flagship event this summer but, as work progresses on bringing a new and exciting, virtual event to our members, our team at head office, as well as the extended NSA organisation, are excited to see how our members and others will engage with our series of virtual events," says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker.

## Webinars

To host the events a new area of the NSA website will be launched to feature the many webinars and features that will take place. "Many members will be familiar with the NSA website and we hope that it acts as an easily navigated resource delivering useful information and updates," adds Phil. "But we are aware that, for some of our members, accessing online webinars and information may still present difficulties. To aid with this we have produced a guide to our website and how to access the many incredibly useful webinars that have taken place during the Covid-19 lockdown on page 14 of this edition of Sheep Farmer magazine."

As well as activity on the NSA website, the

# Sheep industry experts stand together to urge action now

## An open letter to all sheep farmers

We would like to bring to your attention advice from the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group regarding the use of the two newer wormer groups (4-AD orange (Zolvix™) and 5-SI purple Startect).

**Why do we need to act?** We would urge more sheep farmers to follow the advice of the SCOPS group and integrate the two newer groups into their worm control programmes now.

These products help lambs to reach their growth potential by removing the build-up of worms that have survived previous treatments and slow the development of resistance to the older three groups of wormers, if they are used in the right way before the older wormer groups become ineffective.

We would encourage all sheep farmers to introduce one of these new groups at only two points in their worm control plan. Firstly, as part of their quarantine treatments for all incoming sheep, and secondly as a one-off treatment for lambs, in the latter part of the grazing season.

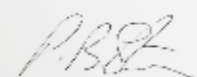
**When should I incorporate?** An effective farm protection (quarantine) treatment is essential to prevent otherwise healthy sheep bringing resistant worms onto the farm. For full details go to: <https://www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/worms/quarantine-treatments/>

To get the most benefit from the treatment for lambs, it is important that it is used in the latter part of the grazing season (as a mid-late season break dose) when a treatment is deemed necessary (ideally following a significant worm egg count).

**Why is this best practise?** The purpose of this treatment is to remove worms that have survived previous treatments with one or more of the older wormer groups (1-BZ white, 2-LV yellow and 3-ML clear). Removing this build-up of worms left behind in the lambs helps them to reach their growth potential and has the double benefit of helping to slow the development of resistance to the older three groups. All lambs remaining on the farm should be treated, but to avoid the risk selecting for resistance to the newer group 4-AD & 5-SI wormers, it is very important not to "dose and move" lambs to "cleaner" grazing straight away. To avoid this risk simply drench the lambs and return them to the same fields for four or five days before moving them. For more details on mid-late season break dose go to: <https://www.scops.org.uk/news/5221/sheep-farmers-encouraged-to-use-newer-wormers-as-a-mid-season-lamb-dose-this-summer/>

The mid-late season break dose for lambs and as part of the farm protection (quarantine) treatment are the only generally recommended times to use these newer products. To avoid the risk of resistance developing to the two newer groups they should not be used at other times without detailed advice from your consultant or sheep vet.

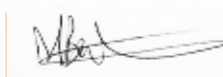
Signed on behalf of



Phil Stocker on behalf of National Sheep Association




Kevin Harrison on behalf of Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep

Dave Bartley on behalf of Moredun Research Institute




Nick Hart on behalf of Sheep Veterinary Society



This letter has been written in partnership with Elanco, makers of Zolvix™.

For further information call Elanco Animal Health on +44 (0)1256 353131 or write to Elanco Animal Health, Lilly House, Priestley Road, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG24 9NL. Zolvix™ 25 mg/ml oral solution for sheep (monepantel). Legal category: [POM-VPS] in UK. Zolvix, Elanco and the diagonal bar logo are trademarks of Elanco or its affiliates. **Use medicines responsibly** ([www.noah.co.uk/responsible](http://www.noah.co.uk/responsible)). © 2020 Elanco or its affiliates. PM-UK-20-0357. rdp 31310. Date of Preparation June 2020.



Virtual continues to replace face-to-face events while Covid-19 outbreak continues.

two-day events will see an increase in activity on NSA's social media channels, Facebook and Twitter, as it aims to reach as many potential interested parties as possible.

Following on from the first 'Breeding the best' two-day event, NSA will hold two further events as we move into autumn and winter. The second event, which will take place on Wednesday 21st and Thursday 22nd October, will be titled 'Feeding the flock, and getting it right' and will focus on winter grazing management, nutrition and health, as well as many other health topics.

The final event will look to the future with its title of 'New Year 'farming' resolutions' and will take place on Wednesday 13th and Thursday 14th January. The open theme of this event will allow for NSA and industry supporters and partners to deliver information on preparing for lambing, vaccination programmes, the industry's promotion of sheep meat, including the promotion of its good environmental credentials, and the industry's response to Veganuary.

For further details, including up to date timetables and news on NSA's upcoming virtual events, visit the new area of the NSA website at [www.nsavirtualevent.org.uk](http://www.nsavirtualevent.org.uk). And don't forget to follow @natsheep on Facebook and Twitter to view more about the exciting events.



Lley stand at NSA Scotsheep.



Rough Fell stand at NSA Sheep Event.



Scottish Blackface stand at NSA Sheep Event.



Beltex stand at NSA Sheep Event.

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## Competitions take a different form at NSA event!

NSA's plans for a virtual event would not be complete without a competition or two for supporters to take part in. Which will you enter?

### ENTER NOW!

#### Capture 'This sheep farming life' for our photography competition!

Have you got an image that captures the essence of life as a sheep farmer? Images following the theme 'This sheep farming life' can be entered for free for a chance to win a fantastic prize kindly supplied by one of our event sponsors. To enter, send your images (up to three per person, digital copies only please) to [competitions@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:competitions@nationalsheep.org.uk) by Friday 7th August.

#### Photograph your fleece for British Wool contest!

Expert graders from British Wool are waiting to judge your fleeces for the virtual British Wool fleece competition. The contest will run with images of rolled fleeces as well as those showing length of staple and crimp submitted to [competitions@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:competitions@nationalsheep.org.uk) along with details of which class you would usually enter your fleece in and name.

#### Pick your prize-winning breed stand!

In recognition of the hard work of NSA affiliated breed societies NSA is celebrating some of the most popular society stands that have featured at events in recent years. Take a look at the four breed society stands that have featured at NSA events to the right. Which is your favourite? Let us know your favourite by voting online at [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/stand-competition](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/stand-competition) for your chance to win a prize!

### ENTER AT THE EVENT!

#### Test your carcass grading

Join NSA at the virtual event to take part in a carcass judging contest for a chance to win a prize donated by event sponsors.

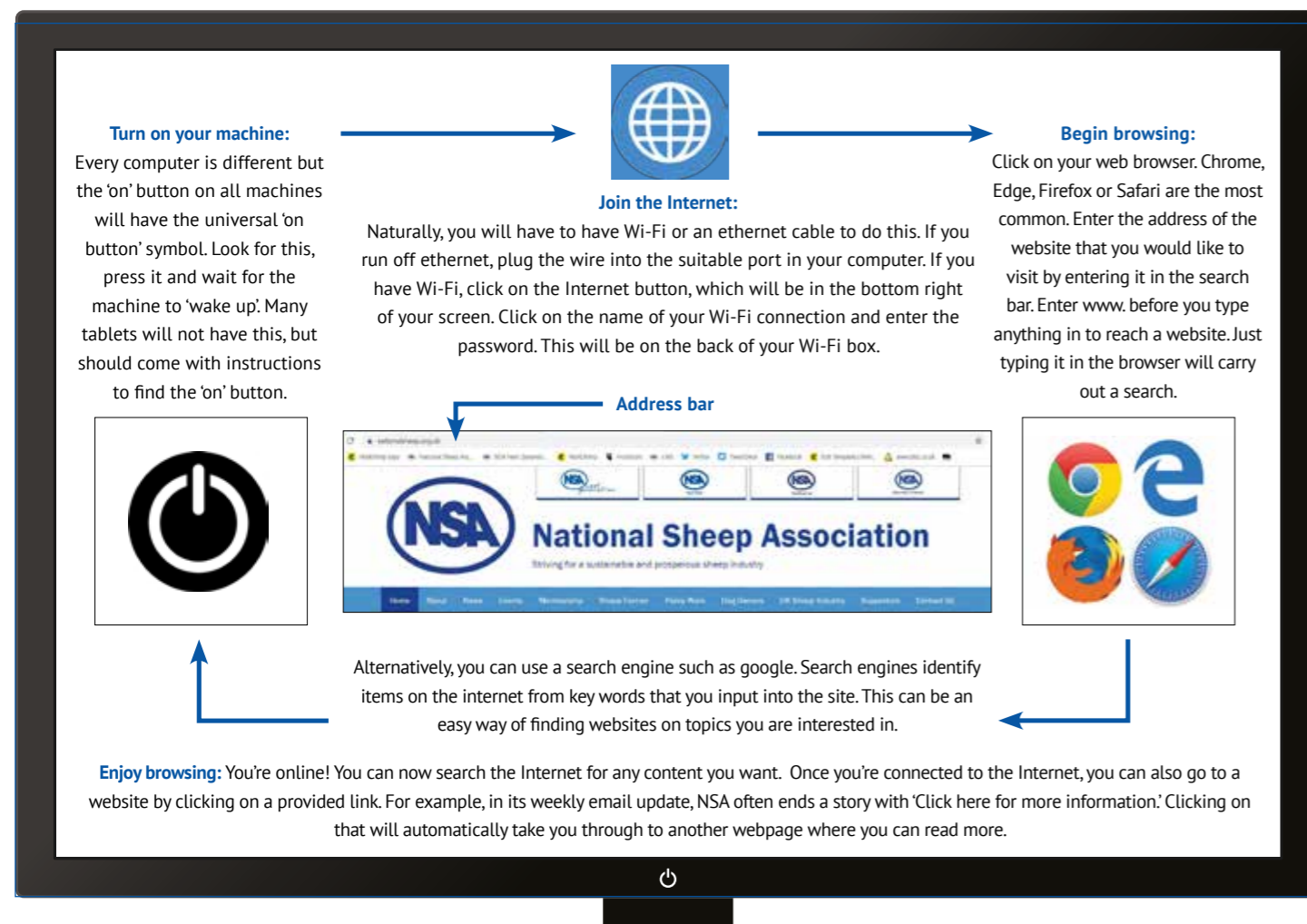
*Find full details and competition terms and conditions at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-sheep-event/attractions/competitions](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-sheep-event/attractions/competitions)*



# Get to grips with the Internet and stay connected

The past few months have seen a dramatic and swift departure from a typical spring and summer – in all respects.

All in-person agricultural events have been cancelled, as well as the UK's two largest ram sales. Fortunately (or unfortunately depending on perspectives), we live in a time of the Internet, which has enabled people to continue meetings, webinars and even some virtual events. However, NSA is aware that a number of members struggle with using the Internet – or even getting on to the computer in the first place. This guide has been produced to help you to get started and to enable NSA members to engage with its online content. Getting online may be daunting, but this easy step-by-step guide will help to get you up and running.



# Webinars – how to join and participate

## Accessing NSA webinars

1. Go to NSA events page: [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)
2. Click on 'Read more' under the webinar you would like to attend
3. Click on the registration button for the webinar. This will take you to a registration page.
4. Fill in the details and click 'Register'.
5. You will receive an email with information on how to join the webinar and a reminder of the date and time.
6. To join the webinar, click the link in the registration confirmation email.
7. If the host has not started broadcasting the webinar or is preparing using a practice session, you'll see the following message: 'Please wait for the host to start this webinar'.

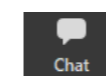
## Webinar features:

**Question & Answer:** Open the Q&A window, allowing you to ask questions to the host and panelists. They can either reply back to you via text in the Q&A window or answer your question live. This will be explained at the start of the webinar

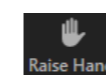
1. Type your question into the Q&A box. Click Send.

Note: Check 'Send Anonymously' if you do not want your name attached to your question in the Q&A.

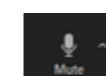
2. If the host replies via the Q&A, you will see a reply in the Q&A window. The host can also answer your question live (out loud). You will see a notification in the Q&A window if the host plans to do this.



**Chat:** Open in-meeting chat, allowing you to send chat messages to and send a message to the host, panelists, and attendees (if permitted).

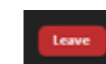


**Raise Hand:** Raise your hand in the webinar to indicate that you need something from the host. The host may instruct you on how they plan to use this. Some webinar hosts use this feature to know if an attendee has a question and would like to speak out loud. The host will then give you permission to speak.



**Unmute/Mute:** If the host gives you permission, you can unmute and talk during the webinar. All participants will be able to hear you. If the host allows you to talk, you will receive a notification. You can access the audio settings by click on the ^ arrow next to the Unmute/Mute button.

**Polls:** The panellist may let you know they intend to use polls during the webinar. If a question is launched a 'pop up' will launch on your screen with the question and answers for you to choose from. Select your answer(s) and click submit. Once the panellist has finished polling they will inform the participants if they are going to share the results and, if they choose to do so, they will pop up on screen.



**Leave meeting:** Click 'Leave meeting' to leave the webinar at any time. If you leave, you can rejoin if the webinar is still in progress, if the host has not locked the webinar.

NSA regularly updates its website and adds all press releases to the 'news' section of the website to help keep members up to date.

Previous webinars can be viewed online at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars)

## Webinar timetable for celebration of sheep

### Webinar - Wednesday 12th August

#### 8.30am: A buyer and sellers guide to health status, treatment programmes and declarations. Sponsored by MSD

Charles Sercombe, Farmer and member of NSA Central Region Committee  
Alison Braddock, SRUC  
Hannah Donegan, MSD

An insight from a farmer with 2 different health status flocks  
Questions to ask as a buyer relating to the PSGHS  
Vet Vaccination Declaration

#### 12.30pm: MSD Sheep Lameness Workshop. Sponsored by MSD

Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health Ltd.

Practical workshop on sheep lameness, including most recent data and guidance on following the Five Point Plan

#### 7.30pm: Achieving optimal performance from your flock

Dan Phipps, Farmer and Chairman of NSA Eastern Region Committee  
Ed Brant, AHDB  
John Richards, HCC

An on farm approach to optimising performance  
Overview of RamCompare  
Outline of Hill Ram Improvements scheme

### Webinar - Thursday 13th August

#### 8.30am: Achieving optimal performance from your flock

Dan Phipps, Farmer and Chairman of NSA Eastern Region Committee  
Ed Brant, AHDB  
John Richards, HCC

An on farm approach to optimising performance  
Overview of RamCompare  
Outline of Hill Ram Improvements scheme

#### 12.30pm: CEVA Animal Health on vaccination on abortion. Sponsored by CEVA

Kythé MacKenzie, Ceva Animal Health  
Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health Ltd.

Can you afford not to vaccinate against infectious abortion?  
What does abortion cost, at what rate is it a problem and how can it be managed?

#### 7.30pm: Rams, understanding the genetics you're working with and MOT. Sponsored by AHDB

Emma Steele, AHDB  
Kate Phillips, Lleyn Society  
Veterinary Surgeon, XL Vets

A guide to EBVs  
An overview of the Lleyn breeding improvement scheme  
Ram MOT's and understanding ram lambs

# Wales and Border Ram Sales pioneer an online register

Following the difficult decision to cancel the NSA Wales and Border Ram Sales shortly before the previous edition of Sheep Farmer went to print, the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale committee has now launched its online register of rams.

"We have introduced this online service for our loyal supporters, both buyers and sellers, in an effort to put potential purchasers in touch with our regular consignors," says NSA Wales and Border Ram Sale Executive Director Jane Smith.

"The map on the website clearly shows where

sheep are located and a drop-down menu allows purchasers to select their chosen breed. If you are a current NSA member, we offer you the opportunity to submit details of sheep that you have for sale, which would usually be entered for either of our two sales.

"It's quite simple to use the drop-down option to select breed or cross. There is no charge for this and photos and a short video can be added to the post. Entries are invited from NSA members, but anyone can purchase direct from the sellers."

She adds that all transactions will be directly between vendors and buyers. NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales is simply acting as a facilitator, to help ease some of the difficulties that this year has brought.

The online register includes an interactive map of sellers.



Members wishing to access the register can do so by visiting [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-ram-sales/online-sales-register/](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-ram-sales/online-sales-register/)

## NSA Ram Sales face different challenges with outbreak restrictions

Ram sales play an important role in any sheep farmer's year, and it was naturally disappointing and immensely difficult for the NSA Wales and Border Ram Sale committee to take the decision to cancel its two sales.

Having taken this decision at the stage it did, NSA Wales and Border were able to save money and the cancellation of Kelso has been somewhat reassuring for this decision, particularly given the money retained by NSA for cancelling at the stage it did. However, that is little reassurance to the industry and NSA is deeply saddened to have had to cancel and to see buyers now without the UK's two largest sales.

NSA is pleased that its Eastern Region and South West Sales are able to continue, and we have understandably been asked, why can three go ahead but not the other two? Sales of this scale come with complex logistics and managing the practicalities of moving and auctioning the sheer number of tups, all while observing social distancing outside of

the set up enjoyed by Auction Marts, would create serious and mind-bogglingly expensive challenges.

All NSA Ram Sales are different, and the sales are all organised by committees that have a high level of autonomy and different issues to deal with. In particular, while our South West, Rugby, and Melton Mowbray sales take place in livestock markets, working with one auction company, and with relatively small numbers of rams, our Wales and Border sale is held on the Royal Welsh showground where the loading and unloading facilities and the infrastructure including the rings is all temporary.

### Licensing

The site requires temporary licensing and there is no infrastructure to help create one-way systems or to support social distancing. The Welsh sales are further complicated by their scale and the numbers of rams being sold and the fact that there are multiple rings selling at the same time. At the main sale there are more than 15 different auction companies involved.



The logistics of running the Wales and Borders sales with Covid-19 restrictions were not feasible.

The logistics of all this mean that social distancing requirements would be difficult, if not impossible, to meet and there is also evidence that many farmers would be too nervous about Covid-19 to attend. Despite the complications, NSA is pleased that it is able to keep three sales running this season and can also state that the Wales and Border sale is planning to be back next year where NSA hopes once again to play a significant part in the seasonal ram sales. In the meantime, NSA is grateful to the auctioneers and breed sales that have organised small sales in the interim.

# Realise your lambs' growth potential<sup>1</sup> now



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[www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/midlate-season](http://www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/midlate-season)

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**CONTROLLING THE VIRUS AT SALES:** The pandemic is not over, and it is important to follow the Government guidelines on social distancing. A strict distancing policy will be in place at all NSA Ram Sales, and buyers will need to register with the auctioneers in advance of the sales. NSA will take every precaution necessary to ensure that attendees are safe, but will also be relying on the conscientious behaviour of those in attendance.

If you have concerns about this, please contact the sale organiser – see contact details on page 2.

For further information call Elanco Animal Health on +44 (0)1256 353131 or write to Elanco Animal Health, Form 2, Bartley Wood, Bartley Wood Business Park, Hook, RG27 9XA.

Zolvix™ 25mg/ml oral solution is a broad spectrum anthelmintic for the treatment and control of gastro-intestinal nematode infections and associated diseases in sheep including lambs, hoggets, breeding rams and ewes. Legal category: [POM-VPS] in UK. Further information can also be found in the Summary of Product Characteristics. **Advice should be sought from the medicine prescriber prior to use.** Zolvix, Elanco and the diagonal bar logo are trademarks of Elanco or its affiliates. **Use medicines responsibly** ([www.noah.co.uk/responsible](http://www.noah.co.uk/responsible)). © 2020 Elanco and its affiliates. Date of preparation: June 2020. PM-UK-20-0377. rdp31306.

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.

# Brexit and the future of the sheep industry

Leaving the EU signals big change for UK Agriculture.

By Phil Stocker, NSA

It was January 1973 when the UK joined the European Community. The EC incorporated the EEC (European Economic Community), commonly referred to in the UK as the Common Market.

Looking back, it's surprising that we held a referendum just two years later in 1975 when we voted to continue our journey within the EC. And there we remained until June 2016, when the Brexit referendum resulted in us leaving, finally and fully at the end of 2020. Our membership of the EU will have been a full 46 years.

All NSA Next Generation Ambassadors and young shepherds will know nothing else but being part of the European Union (the EC became the EU in 1992), and all of my age range will have spent virtually all our working lives being part of the European Community, one way or another.

The origins of the EU were founded on nations seeking peace in the wake of regular conflict and war. This co-operation led to both political and economic alignment and, in the 1960s, the ending of customs duties between member nations.

Food production and food security was a crucial element of maintaining peace and was undeniably successful, which provided affordable and plentiful food for people. The Common Agriculture Policy aimed to provide food security and also to ensure a reasonable living for farmers and growers.

At its roots it was a policy blend of providing food security, and social and economic wellbeing for food producers. It wasn't until the 1970s that environmental concerns started to bite.

Arguably things got somewhat confused at this stage and the balance became lost between the CAP being an agricultural policy, a social policy, an environmental policy for farming, or an environmental policy per se.

The fact that agriculture was supported and protected met no favours with a growing world

trade organisation. The WTO was born from GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) in the mid-1990s and one of its key aims was to aid global trade liberalisation.

## Enterprise

Gradually farming and food production was moving from being an almost semi-nationalised industry – in private hands but very much with public interest and outcomes in mind – towards operating in a free-market economy based on private enterprise.

Within agriculture, UK governments of all parties, possibly as long as 30 years ago, led the field calling for reform of the EU, and looking back now you could argue that the cracks in our relationship were already there to see.

It should be no surprise that as soon as we had the opportunity to leave the EU that the British Government set out strong reformist plans for agriculture, the environment, and food.

Within months of the 2016 referendum the discussion documents started to emerge. These differ nationally and, generally, the more important agriculture is to the nation, the more it is valued, with assurances for protection.

But a clear message of principle is coming from all national policy proposals and for me it sets the future direction clearly:

1. To increase business productivity.
2. To maintain and further improve our environment.

This was set out most clearly in Defra's early discussion document 'Health and Harmony'. The ambition to increase productivity confused people straight away with most thinking we were being challenged to produce more to feed a growing global population.

Critics of the discussion document immediately pointed out that there was likely to be a contradiction between a policy that aimed to produce more and, at the same time, further enhance the environment. Eventually it emerged

that 'productivity' is a measure of business efficiency. It's a proxy for profitability – the margin that is left after all costs are taken away from the value of the outputs.

While we all have an interest in improving profitability, the Government does too in its ambition to remove farm support – something that respective governments have wanted to do for decades. This should be foremost in our minds – policy direction is that farming enterprises need to stand on their own two feet.

One of the challenges sheep farming has, more so than other farming enterprises, is that the environment and public goods are completely integrated, to a greater or lesser extent, with productivity. It mostly takes place on the same area of land, it is all interconnected, and it is, therefore, more difficult to cost separately.

## Productivity

There are three main options to increase productivity: increase the value of outputs; reduce costs; and invest in inputs that yield a profit. For many it will result in an ambition to increase the total number and value of lambs sold, but for many others it will be achieved by reducing outputs but reducing inputs by a greater amount.

The ambition to maintain and further enhance our environment is where most future funds will come to farming – public money for public goods. In theory we are in a great position here – if we can broaden the understanding and acceptance of public goods, get full and proper appreciation of the value of grassland, and have a sensible scheme design.

The debate about food production being a 'public good' continues, but is dismissed by Government officials. It's accepted that food production is in the public interest, and that it brings a public benefit, but it's only public goods that attract public money.

So now, as we leave EU regulations behind, we approach Britain's first new Agriculture Bill since 1947. This is set to be an 'enabling Bill' in that it is

short on detail but gives flexibility. Flexibility may be good, but it brings a trade off with commitment. And we know that manifesto promises persist for five years – a far shorter period than a farming cycle.

## Environmental

We have also been relying on the EU for environmental and food policy, so Britain also has embarked on creating a new Environment Bill and a Food Strategy. We have a fall back of all EU legislation having been adopted by Britain, but the Agriculture Bill is on track to finish its approval process during the autumn and the Environment Bill is similar. We will wait longer for our food strategy. The Agriculture Bill will enable a new suite of farm support schemes and these will align fully with the Government's ambitions to reduce farm support (by raising productivity), and reward for outputs considered to be public goods that can't be recouped in a normal marketplace.

Agriculture is a devolved matter, so we can expect variations across our UK nations.

The timescales will vary too, but we can expect to see the end of the Basic Payment Scheme – in England it will likely have gone completely by 2028 with phased payment reductions starting in 2022. In its place will gradually come ELMS, although with a broadening interpretation of 'environment' and possibly including things that contribute to health and wellbeing, and agricultural diversity.

Payment levels are far from clear and, even if we can secure similar levels of financial opportunity, what will change is the freedom that the Basic Payment provides. ELMS will undoubtedly want specific things for its money. The Westminster Government has also been clear that it wants to raise animal welfare standards and has stated that it is prepared to reward farmers for higher welfare outcomes.

Raising animal health and welfare may well be things that the public want to see and that the Government is prepared to invest in, but in the world of sheep farming, along with nutrition, it is probably the easiest way to make productivity gains. In England, this strand is coming through the Pathway programme, still in fairly early

stages of development, but it is likely to offer some support and incentive to raise welfare and invest in health measures.

The final strand where we expect to see Government support is productivity incentives. We can expect to see a small capital grants scheme in 2021, and a similar scheme for larger investments as time goes by. Typically, these will aim to improve productivity but will also link with environmental or climate change objectives. It's likely that we will see training incentives and encouragement for retirement too.

In summary our Government has the freedom to do what it has wanted to do for a long time – put an end to basic payments and steer public money towards things that are clearer and clearly in the public interest. It knows that all farming enterprises can be profitable, and it wants to drive the average upwards. The Government believes that our future is based on high standards – of product quality, and environment and animal health and welfare. And it believes that our reputation and credentials will improve our market opportunities and that we will grow market options through new trade deals globally.

## Ambitions

Just peeking through the window there is little to disagree with in these ambitions. But it's a new model that is still lacking any economic certainty on an industry-wide scale.

It could also result in some unintended or undesirable consequences. Despite promises to the contrary, it could mean that we push our standards higher but allow our domestic market to gorge itself on cheaper products from elsewhere. It could result in a significant loss of farmed land to 'nature' and, in doing so, have a negative impact on food security and farmland ecology.

It could also lead to the loss of many small family scale farms, in part because the British view is still too often that part-time farming is not serious farming. As always, change is full of opportunities but also fraught with risks, and while many would agree with the overall

## Agriculture Bill

The Agriculture Bill applies to England, with provisions to support Wales and Northern Ireland as their bills are delivered. Scotland chose not to engage with this Bill.

The Bill sets out:

- A timeline for the removal of BPS.
- The future framework for environment-based farm support (ELMS).
- Government powers to intervene.
- Domestic provisions for fairness in the supply chain.
- Provisions to meet World Trade Organisation obligations for trade.
- A requirement for Ministers to report on food security, and to consider the need to encourage domestic production.

## What will ELMS look like?

ELMS will provide financial support for the delivery of 'public goods'. Public goods are defined as something that benefits the greater good without providing financial benefit to anyone. Named public goods on the most recent policy document include:

- Clean and plentiful water
- Clean air
- Protection from and mitigation of environmental hazards
- Mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- Beauty, heritage and engagement

The current thinking is geared towards a three-tiered system. The proposed tiers are:

- Tier 1: To incentivise environmentally sustainable farming and forestry and help to deliver environmental benefits. All farmers will be eligible.
- Tier 2: To incentivise the management of land in a way that delivers locally targeted environmental outcomes. All land managers will be eligible but is targeted at those wanting to tackle environmental challenges.
- Tier 3: To deliver land use change projects at a landscape scale to deliver environmental outcomes. All land managers will be eligible but is targeted at limited land areas with the right natural capital assets and at the right spatial scale to deliver transformational land use change.

For more information visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/pdfs/elm-policy-discussion-document-230620.pdf](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/pdfs/elm-policy-discussion-document-230620.pdf)

ELMS will be tiered, with the third tier focusing on landscape wide-projects.

# Predator survey results preview highlights flock threats

Initial results would indicate that ravens are the most widely found predator closely followed by crows and foxes. Of 261 respondents, more than 90% have seen an increase in the number of predator attacks in the past few years.

This seems to be due an uncontrollable rise in the number of predators and competition for food, with a decrease in the number of people available to control them and legislative restrictions.

An overwhelming 76% described the period during birth to first week of lambing as the most critical time for attacks to occur, in April and May. Some 81% said they have witnessed an attack and, as a result, have increased their stock checking during the day, started lambing indoors, and also moved their flocks closer to the farm yard, alongside many other strategies in an attempt to mitigate attacks.

Descriptions of ravens and crows attacking ewes and newborn lambs throughout the day and night, in a range of locations on the farm, were numerous and in-bye ground was seen to be the most prevalent setting.

## Impact

When asked the estimated financial impact of an attack on the sheep farming enterprise, the majority selected between £500 and £1,000. It is apparent that a high percentage of respondents do not report these incidents and of those who have they found that no action has been taken due to limitations, such as insufficient levels of evidence to proceed further. In addition to this, current licensing allows only a limited number of predatory birds to be culled and farmers feel that it is a waste of time to apply for a licence.

Loss of bloodlines, hefting ability and breeding qualities, and many other traits that have all been built over time, cannot be replaced and these all present the case for change. Suggestions such as compensation for losses, improved ability to control predator numbers and

a general licence to shoot birds during lambing time have all been made clear and increased police awareness on these matters would certainly be a positive step in the right direction. Further guidance on how to control predators that cannot legally be destroyed at the current time is also seen to be necessary. It is also worth remembering that it's not only livestock that's being lost but also ground nesting birds and waders, which have had habitats carefully created for them. Biodiversity on the whole is suffering the consequences of an imbalanced food web.

## Stress

Additionally, the mental health aspects of dealing with the nature of these attacks, particularly in the younger generation when starting out on their sheep farming journey, only adds to the current stress on the industry.

The intention, going forward, would be to facilitate change in the processes relating to the follow up of incident aftermath and prevention in the future.

By Grace Reid, NSA

The predator survey revealed 76% of attacks occurred on lambs from birth to a week old.



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## Devolved Policy

### Call for farmers' views on sheep worrying

By Jen Craig, Regional Chairman



You may have recently seen that new dog protection livestock legislation has been introduced by Emma Harper MSP on 14th May 2020 has been progressing through Scottish Parliament.

It seeks to strengthen and update the law on livestock worrying, in the main, by amending the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953.

NSA Scottish Region is actively seeking evidence and your views on the Bill, which amends the existing law on what is called 'livestock worrying' whereby a dog chases, attacks or kills farmed animals, to present to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. It is particularly important

that NSA Scottish Region gains evidence on this matter. We are all aware that occurrences are consistently happening, but to gauge the number of attacks and severity is essential to amending legislation to protect flock welfare, profitability, and general well-being.

The proposed amendments in the Bill, to increase penalties and provide additional powers for enforcement of existing offences and investigations, is a long-needed response to safeguarding the future not to mention reducing stress and associated costs.

If you wish to discuss any of the matters highlighted or provide evidence in the form of writing or photographs, please do not hesitate to contact me by Friday 21st August 2020. My contact details can be found on page two.

## Cymru/Wales welcomes Government's tone

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region has welcomed the tone of the Welsh Government's response to the Sustainable Farming and Our Land consultation.

But we retain some concern about the longevity of policy changes. One specific concern regards further consultation with no specific timescales. The announcement seems to hint that there will be an interim scheme from when BPS ends and a new scheme is launched. But with Senedd Elections due next May, there is concern this policy will not be delivered as said.

However, there is a lot of positive detail to be worked through and the principles set out in the Minister's statement are welcomed and read as being supportive of farming in Wales, as well as recognising the value of farmers and farming to the nation.

NSA does not read this as meaning that change will not come - in many areas we welcome change and we agree with many of the statements

made in the Government's response. We welcome the references to the importance of food production in Wales and the contribution that high quality food production will contribute to Welsh Sustainable Brand Values.

### Security

We also welcome the references to food security and the importance of export and imports so that Wales can lean towards producing what the nation's climate and natural resources and culture do so well, and recognising that other nations will do likewise and that consumers in Wales will want choice and dietary variation. In terms of future support to farming in Wales, again we welcome the principle that the Government should incentivise and support farmers to run truly sustainable farming systems. And we welcome the intention to move away beyond the income foregone approach, with a strong suggestion that sustainability is viewed in the widest of contexts - multi-functional farming and land management.

## Aid package success for region

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



In my previous report we were amid a battle to get the sheep sector recognised as our Minister of Agriculture, Edwin Poots, pieced together an aid package to help counter the effects of the Covid-19 crisis. The following is an extract from the Minister's statement:

"Losses within the sheep sector have been assessed and evidence demonstrates that the price for lambs fell in week ending 28 March and remained relatively low for four weeks, before recovering to pre Covid-19 levels in the week ending 25 April. Comparing total sales in the four week period (w/e 28 March to w/e 25 April) to the previous

four weeks before the prices fell, there was a total loss to the sector of £232,000 that equates to approximately £6.88 per lamb. I am aware that many sheep farmers have not been able to receive any benefit from the Self Employment Relief Scheme, due to low levels of profit in recent years. On that basis, I am compensating them for 100% of their losses.

### Discussions

We do welcome this support, but our request for help in the wool sector has not yet been fruitful. Meanwhile, we continue discussions highlighting that the fall in wool prices is a direct result of the closure of the market with China. Surely there are some innovative minds out there that can find a use for this amazing and adaptable product rather than the waste product it is at present.

## Selling more lambs next year starts now, before conception

### How much could 10% more lambs be worth to you? asks vet Dr Elizabeth Berry: Per-100 ewes...10 more sales...at £??/?/lamb?

Regardless what UK/EU trade talks bring, preparing ewes for tupping as much as 12 to 16 weeks before conception could produce more lambs for sale next year, according to Dr Berry from Animax. "At today's values in a typical 500-ewe lowland flock, this could be worth £5,000 or more," she says.

"For any crop of lambs, of course, the die is cast well before tupping by getting ewes into ideal condition for high conception rates and embryo retention, maximum twin-bearing pregnancies, and low barren rate."

By now, many flock owners will have checked body condition scores after weaning and segregated ewes into thin, just right and fat groups. Unless grazing is really sparse, Dr Berry suggests that managing their nutrition in readiness for tupping needn't involve buying much feed.

She says supplying the essential trace elements in which much of the country is deficient means that decent pasture may be relied on for getting ewes to optimum body condition score for tupping, 3.5 (lowland) or 2.5 (hill breeds).

Critical trace elements are usually selenium, iodine and cobalt, plus copper in some known localities. Without supplementation, Dr Berry advises that the full nutrient value of pasture cannot be utilised and concentrates may be needed, especially for under-weight ewes.

"Among available methods - drenching, in-feed minerals, free-access licks, etc - the one offering 180-days' duration, single handling of ewes, and constant trickle-charge release of trace elements, is Tracesure Sheep & Lamb," she says.

"Giving these leaching boluses is easy, with a short video demonstration and telephone advice available for first-timers."

Leaching bolus technology was developed by and is unique to Animax.

### Farmer-to-farmer wisdom

"Fitter ewes, higher conception rates, a more compact lambing period, and consistent lamb birth-weights" are reported by David Cromie near Rathfriland, Co Down, Northern Ireland.

Twice-yearly, his and father Alan's Millhaven Charollais and commercial crossbred ewes are bolused with Tracesure Sheep & Lamb, well ahead of tupping and again pre-lambing. "In addition to increased production, we also value the peace of mind that trace element deficiencies are covered," David says.

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## Reviving the 'golden hoof'

By Nicola Noble, NSA

Historically, sheep were given the title 'golden hoof', so it has long been known that there is real value in keeping sheep on poorer soils.

In the past, sheep were kept on arable farms mainly to control weeds and cereal pests, with the added bonus of depositing manure and increasing soil fertility for the following crops.

After World War Two, the drive towards specialisation, intensification, and an increased use of machinery, resulted in a higher reliance on fertilisers and artificial herbicides, reducing the demand for sheep in these circumstances.

As farmers, we are responsible for the land we own and work with. According to Environment Agency research, intensification has led to UK arable soils experiencing a 60% decline in soil carbon since the industrial revolution. And intensification has increased habitat losses and other ecosystem services. With Brexit on the horizon, the use of mixed farming systems is an opportunity to further facilitate the wider benefits for all.

### Infrastructure

The introduction of livestock to arable farms requires infrastructure and careful management. Many arable farmers have agreements with local sheep farmers, where a 'flying flock' is grazed on the arable land at specific time periods. This delivers benefits to both sheep and arable farmers, but the introduction of livestock to arable farms requires equipment, planning and continued management.

All joint enterprises need to be thoroughly

investigated and careful contracts drawn up, preferably with experienced advice and a clear understanding of expectations from both parties. Grazing agreements should consider who is responsible for animal husbandry, provision of infrastructure and, going forward, who will claim any reward for provision of public goods.

Some sheep farmers may struggle with the uncertainty of grazing and contract lengths, so a grazing license (rather than agreement) may be better suited for certain situations. It is essential that agreements are reached before the livestock arrive on farm.

### Resource

Soil is the raw material from which most food is produced and, therefore, a precious natural resource. A recent survey by Rothamsted Research found that nearly 40% of arable soils in England and Wales are classified as 'degraded' mainly due to loss of organic matter, soil erosion and damage to soil structure. Less than 7% of grassland and woodland soils were given the same rating. Planting cover crops and diverse leys in arable rotations not only provides nutrient-rich fodder for sheep, they also further enhance the value to other fauna and flora.

Diversity creates complex root and shoot architecture, allowing increased water filtration and reduced soil compaction. This helps to manage flood risk and gives soils sponge-like properties to increase their water holding capacity and support plant growth through drought. Sheep defecate more evenly than cattle and their manure contributes to as much as 35% of soil organic matter.

And these valuable nutrients are released

slowly and, therefore, remain in the soil for long periods of time. So sheep grazing increases the cycling of organic matter, which ultimately increases soil fertility and health.

More than a quarter of all living species on earth are found in the soil, so providing healthy and fertile soils ensures an efficient food web, driving nitrogen, phosphorus and the all-important carbon cycles. Soil carbon is vital for the proper functioning of soil, but using this value alone hasn't previously allowed a true reflection of soil health. Scientists at Rothamsted Research have developed an easy to use 'soil health' measure, which can be used to advise farmers how best to manage their land. "Previously, no one could tell you what a good level of organic matter for a particular soil was," says Rothamsted's Steve McGrath. "Having an index facilitates decisions on where to grow, where to treat, and where to build – depending on the condition of the soil."

UK soils store around 10 billion tonnes of carbon, roughly equal to 80 years of annual UK greenhouse gas emissions. Good soil husbandry needs to be incorporated into farming practices to rebuild the soil's carbon stores and prevent the release of greenhouse gases. With the current focus on building soil carbon and the role of farming in relation to public goods, this is the ideal time for more systems to adopt sheep back into their rotations to preserve and maintain carbon sinks.

"This valuable work from Rothamsted shows that grassland supports high levels of soil quality," says NSA's Phil Stocker. "This won't surprise many grassland farmers and it's great to see the evidence coming through to

## Benefits of sheep in arable

### Sheep Farmer

- Nutritional benefits from grazing broader diets, particularly with diverse swards.
- Potential anthelmintic properties of species rich pasture (such as chicory), reducing veterinary costs.
- Access to clean grazing, reducing veterinary costs further.
- Finishing lambs quicker through increased liveweight gain on high output ryegrass/clover leys.
- Additional acreage for first-generation farmers or those looking to expand.
- Provide outwintering opportunities, which reduce need for housing, reducing costs.
- Promotes relationship between upland and lowland farmers through finishing or store lambs or away-wintering breeding stock.
- Allows young entrants route into agriculture – the future of British Agriculture relies on young people entering the industry.

### Arable Farmer

- Improved soil health and fertility.
- Higher organic matter in soils.
- Helps maintain carbon sinks, reducing climate change.
- Grazing allows novel strategy to combat weeds, such as blackgrass and brome.
- Grazing allows management strategy to tackle pests and fungal infections in crop.
- Improved nutrient status in soil, so reduced fertiliser inputs and costs.
- Reduced pesticide inputs, reducing costs.
- Increased productivity and higher yields in following crops.
- Arable by-products, such as vegetable tops and straw, can be consumed by sheep and turned into protein for low cost.

References available at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/pdfs/augustseptember-article-references.pdf](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/pdfs/augustseptember-article-references.pdf).

support this long-held thinking. These findings also suggest that grassland is equally as good as woodland for building and maintaining soil organic matter – a practical proxy for soil carbon.

"This again is something that the NSA has

long felt is the case and it's encouraging to see evidence coming out to support this view. This is a step forward in building a positive case for Britain being a pastoral grassland country. Our grasslands have, for too long, been undervalued for their role in sustainable food

production while, at the same time, creating a great landscape, providing wildlife habitats and access opportunities. And this work shows that it's a crucial part of a stable carbon cycle.

"Rothamsted's findings, coupled with work at Oxford University on GWP that shows

For advice on overcoming these barriers, and on how to step up adequate electric fencing and information on specific regulations, see 'The Benefits of Sheep in Arable Rotations: A National Sheep Association Publication' on NSA's website.

Grazing agreements should consider who is responsible for animal husbandry.



Many arable farms will require electric fencing.

## Barriers to including sheep in arable rotations

- Lack of stock proof fencing, so need for electric fencing.
- Lack of troughs for water and built-in handling facilities and shelter.
- Quarantine and biosecurity risks associated with moving animals.
- Added challenge of movement recordings, ID, cross compliance, and welfare.

▶ that methane production from a stable livestock population is not the problem it was previously thought to be, the case for grass-based ruminant production gets stronger and stronger," adds Phil.

Intensification has led to the use of more productive grass varieties or alternative fodder crops, such as maize. Modern crop varieties have been bred to maximise yield, not to achieve optimal nutrient use, further reducing the value of our soils.

In addition, a greater use of fertiliser and a shift from hay to more frequent cuts of silage, have all come at the expense of farmland wildlife. Soil alone contains an abundance of life - in just a gram of soil there can be as many as a billion bacteria. This is around five tonnes

of soil organisms per hectare, or the equivalent of 100 sheep.

## Habitats

Incorporating sheep into arable, particularly where diverse leys are used, stimulates rich habitats and abundant food sources. This increases populations of small mammals, pollinators and farmland birds, as well as enhancing the ecosystem.

Another advantage of grazing instead of cutting or burning, gives mobile species a greater chance to move to other areas within the habitat. NSA will be working hard with a range of organisations to find ways to help support those livestock farmers and graziers who are managing important habitats with

limited economic return, to ensure that the new system of public money for public goods recognises the benefits their activities produce and rewards them accordingly.

# NSA Next Generation Ambassador summer updates



NSA Next Generation Ambassador Alasdair Hill manages a mixed enterprise comprising 450 ewes and 150 suckler beef cattle on a farm near Keynsham, in Somerset. Here he gives an update on his new venture with his own flock of Badger Face sheep.

It has been an exciting time recently for my partner Wenni and I because we have just started our own flock, comprising 15 Badger Face Welsh Mountain ewes. Our aim is to continue to produce good quality pure-bred lambs fit for market and we may also give showing a go.

As well as producing breeding stock, we would also like to produce lamb boxes to sell in the local area. As I work full time as a farm manager on a local sheep farm, this enterprise is something we hope we can slowly grow around my current job and then have something of our own to focus on in the future.

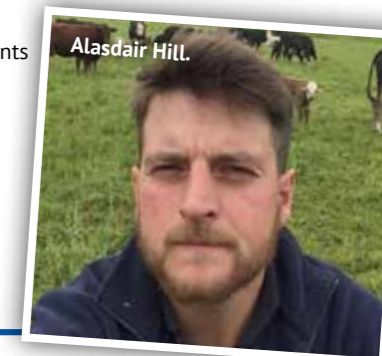
When it comes to work, it has been busy

with weaning following their year's successful lambing and trying to keep on top of the flush of grass growth that has followed the recent rain. We have also been investing in more ewes to increase the size of the flock. We have added 200 Aberfield cross LLeyn shearlings to the pedigree LLeyn flock. As well as increasing flock size, we have invested in a couple of Abermax rams, due to their growth rates on grass and ease of lambing. My aim with these changes is to reduce the use of concentrates and lower the input costs to finish lambs.

## Guidelines

Covid-19 has been a shock to the system, as it has been for many people and businesses. Due to there being a small team of us working on the farm, we have had to get used to socially

distancing while working with each other and finding new ways to do the jobs that require close contact. Government guidelines mean that we have been unable to accept agriculture and veterinary students on to the farm, which has been a shame as I do enjoy the shared education and development this experience brings. Other than these changes, the farm has been running as usual and we look forward to seeing what the new developments bring.



Alasdair Hill.

Government guidelines mean that we have been unable to accept agriculture and veterinary students on to the farm, which has been a shame as I do enjoy the shared education and development this experience brings.

Alasdair Hill

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Ruthin – Mon 7 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Carlisle – Thurs 24 <sup>th</sup> Sept
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Jodie Swan runs 80 ewes on upland pastures in the Southern Lake District in Cumbria, as well as taking on self-employed shepherding work in the local area. Here she tells us how the past few months have seen a positive change to her business.

These past few months have been filled with changes, and ups and downs. During lockdown there is, of course, still work to do with the sheep and land maintenance. But I did, unfortunately, lose out on some self-employed work, due to people shielding because of Covid-19.

## Lambing

That said, I was fortunate to have a contract of independent lambing work throughout March and April, which saw me through until my sheep were lambing, and then the work of helping out with shearing and hay making started.

A huge positive for my business was gaining

an additional nine ha (22 acres) from June this year on a five-year farming business tenancy. This means that I can expand my flock and buy in more sheep later in the year. And I can also focus on keeping my best performing ewe lambs.

To monitor this, I have been weighing lambs at one to two days old, then at three to four weeks old in May, when they get their initial worm dose for Nematodirus, and again at eight weeks. This is keeping me aware of growth rates throughout this period and allowing me to make any changes needed if it's not on target. I also keep an eye on ewe body condition scores throughout this period. I sheared the ewes in early June and I will be making a decision about weaning in the coming weeks, based on these figures.

During the past couple of months, I have

been working hard to get on top of spraying for thistles and nettles, and mowing bracken. With the sudden rain after the dry weather, everything has started to bloom and I am keen to keep on top of it. Year after year I am managing to restore grassland, but it just takes persistence.

Jodie has produced an excellent video showing some of her work in the lake district that can now be viewed on the NSA website at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/next-generation/ambassador-blogs](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/next-generation/ambassador-blogs).



Jodie Swan.

These past few months have been filled with changes, and ups and downs. During lockdown there is, of course, still work to do with the sheep and land maintenance.

Jodie Swan

# Top tips on looking after yourself and your farm

Rural crime is an issue that affects farmers and other people living in rural communities. Crime specifically relating to farming is known as agricultural crime and covers everything from machinery thefts to livestock worrying.

Rural crime is often difficult to police and frequently under-reported, making it difficult for problems to be addressed. Many rural areas now have specifically trained rural police officers, with some having whole teams dedicated to rural crime. In addition, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has its rural affairs strategy to improve rural policing. The strategy has six operational priorities that the NPCC recognises aren't exclusive, but are the most frequent and challenging issues faced by farmers and rural police forces. These are:

- Farm machinery, plant and vehicle theft
- Livestock offences (including theft and worrying)
- Fuel theft
- Equine crime
- Fly-tipping
- Poaching

NSA works with the police in the livestock offences area. While there is ongoing work to prevent rural crime by the police, there is plenty that farmers can do to protect their farms and livestock, and to help make the police's job easier if a crime does occur.

## Be accessible

Make sure that your farm/house is easily identifiable to allow emergency services to locate you quickly. You could also try downloading 'what3words'. What3words is a phone app, or a website, that identifies locations on a grid, with every 3m<sup>2</sup> having a different name. This means that you can be found quickly and easily in an emergency, be this by the police or other emergency services.



Ensure wooden door and window frames are not rotten.

## Tips to tackle sheep theft

You can take the following steps to help prevent sheep thefts:

- Always secure your gates with a chain and padlock, and make sure that all gates and fences are in good condition.
- Ensure your sheep are tagged and, where possible, have an identifying marker.
- If able to, block tracks for vehicle access.
- Ask neighbours and other locals to notify the police or crime stoppers if they spot a suspicious vehicle or person. Do not approach the person, but report their number plate and, if possible, take a photograph.
- Keep pedigree and more valuable stock closer to home.

In some instances, thefts are immediately preceded by a spate of dog thefts. Always ensure that your dog is kept securely and, if your dog does go missing, be extra vigilant for sheep rustlers. In the unfortunate event that your sheep are stolen, report it to the police immediately. Note the location of the theft and police can use traffic cameras to identify any suspicious vehicles.

## Equipment theft

The most commonly stolen equipment on sheep farms is quad bikes. While the following steps may have a cost, it is far cheaper than a stolen bike.

- Put a tracker on your bike, which means that it can be found easily.
- Register your farm vehicles with DataTag. This is a database for farm vehicles comparable to the DVLA.
- Record your quad bike and other vehicles (including trailers) serial numbers. If trailers can also be registered with the company and a tag can be added so if the serial number appears it will be flagged up as stolen.
- Secure all equipment, including bikes, in a secure indoor space near the house where you or your dogs would hear a disturbance. Ensure the window and door frames are not rotten and are solid. Where possible, put steel bars over windows and add a steel door. Make sure no bolts or screws are facing out as potential thieves will be prepared to remove the door.
- Do not leave trailers out without hitch locks and/or wheel clamps.

## General tips

- Set up CCTV around the yard to deter and catch thieves in action. If you are concerned about the investment, this equipment could also be set up in the lambing shed to monitor your ewes during lambing time. Alternatively, Wildlife Trail cameras (which only film when movement triggers them) could be used.
- Invest in infrared beams that, when broken, set off a warning alarm or notify your phone.
- Use outdoor movement-sensitive lights that will switch on and scare off intruders.
- Criminals will access your farm from any route possible, so make it difficult for them by turning gate hinges upside down so they can't be lifted off.
- Contact Google and request your farm be taken off Google Earth. It is common for information to be gathered about farms using Google Earth to map out the area before arriving.



Always wear a helmet when out on the quad.

## Dog worrying

One of the most frequent issues reported with rural crime is livestock worrying. Unlike many other crimes, the perpetrator of livestock worrying (in most cases) does not intend to commit the crime. You can try and prevent your flock being affected by:

- Clearly marking the fields your sheep are in with signs. If possible, remove the signs when the sheep are absent so dog walkers aren't desensitised to them. *Dog worrying signs are available free from NSA Head Office - contact details can be found on page 2.*
- Proactively engage in your local community – be it virtually or in person. Helping people understand the reasons for keeping their dog on a lead can make a difference.
- If possible, keep ewes in lamb or with lambs at foot on fields away from footpaths.
- Ensure fields and gates are secure – this could help prevent a loose dog from getting in.
- If you decide to shoot the attacking dog, know the law. You must make every reasonable attempt to distract the dog first, you must not shoot the dog if it is running away from the sheep.

## Mental health tops agenda in outbreak

Mental health is important to keep high on the agenda at all times, but the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the issues farmers struggle with, particularly isolation, during the past few months. Throughout this period, charities such as NSA have continued to press home the risks that Covid-19 placed on farms and farmers, such as the extra stress of contingency if something happened. Other charities, including FCN, RABI, and RSABI, have been busy offering support to farmers across the UK in these difficult circumstances.

## Keeping safe on the farm remains a priority

Farm Safety Week has become a key focus in the farming calendar in the UK, with 2020 marking the campaign's eighth year. The Farm Safety Partnership, which NSA is part of, organises the week-long campaign every July to highlight the number of serious accidents and fatal injuries in the industry and what is being done to prevent them.

The campaign's focus this year was on the on-farm risks to children, risks while working with machinery and dangerous livestock, and working at height. But, with everyone being affected by Covid-19, it also sought to consider the mental wellbeing of the farming community and how this, in turn, can affect farmer safety at work.

"There is increasing evidence that those affected by a mental health condition are more likely to take unnecessary risks and have poor judgement at work," says NSA Communications Officer Katie James, who represents NSA in the Farm Safety Partnership. "This increases their chance of being involved in an accident.

"Concerns related to Covid-19 may have also exacerbated mental health issues this year and Farm Safety Week aimed to increase awareness of the advice and guidance available to those in the farming community who may be affected."

The campaign also shared information that showed that despite the agricultural industry's poor safety record it is improving, with fewer fatal incidents reported during the past year.

"This apparent improvement in farm safety shows things are definitely moving in the right direction, but that doesn't mean that any of us involved in working on farms should become complacent," adds Katie.

"I'd encourage anyone to continue to share the message of the importance of farm safety with all colleagues, friends and family members who could potentially need protecting from the many dangers we encounter on farm on a daily basis."

More information on farm safety and the campaign week can be found at: [www.yellowwellies.org.uk](http://www.yellowwellies.org.uk)

## Issues with mental health affects us all.

If you need any kind of assistance, call the Farming Helpline for free on 03000 111 999. **Don't suffer alone.**

This service is provided by FCN between 7am and 11pm, 365 days a year. FCN can direct you to other support services where needed.





# Dedication to genetics and performance recording forms basis of business model

By Ellie Phipps, NSA

As an active member on NSA Central Region Committee, as well as NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale committee, alongside a list of other industry roles, Charles Sercombe has plenty to keep him busy off the farm. However, these activities are complementary to his farm business.

Based at Sandlands Farm, near Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, Charles runs his 2,200 strong flock across two main units, and additional pockets of land, with help from his wife, Helen, and flock manager, Chris Deptford. "We don't have the best grazing available in this area – any land that can produce wheat does – so we end up with what is left," Charles explains.

One of his key focuses is genetics and, since leaving college in 1986, Charles has always kept Charollais and has been developing this area of his flock by using performance recording since 1990. Charollais, as well as a newly developed maternal line developed in conjunction with Innovis, forms the core of the business.

"I have worked with Innovis for 15 years. It started when the company bought some Charollais rams, but now I am a breeding partner producing Abermax rams from a flock of 200 Abermax ewes.

"Whatever the breed performance, recording is key to genetic improvement. I firmly believe

that if you don't measure it you can't manage it. Knowing what a tup will produce is an essential tool to producing better lambs, which can have a financial benefit of between £3 and £4 per lamb.

"But it's not just that – recording can help to improve our productivity and this means a greater meat yield from fewer sheep. That's an excellent win for the industry, particularly at this time as we strive towards a more sustainable future."

## Prestigious

The development of his Charollais genetics has remained as the centre of Charles' business, and his sheep have won prestigious awards, including Champion of Champions at the RWAS. And he has consistently been at the top of the breed for performance.

But Charles continues to strive for further improvement, joking that he'll be ready to retire when he finds it. "My perfect maternal sheep would deliver two healthy lambs every year – both of which grow to 40kg in 12 weeks. The ewes would be in the same condition by weaning as they were at tugging, and they'd never go lame or get mastitis. That is the dream."

Charles runs his Charollais, Abermax and nucleus maternal flocks on his home farm, Sandlands. The other unit is at Baggrave Estate carrying 1,600 Lley-based ewes. The ewes are all crossed with either Charollais, Abermax or Aberfield tups. "I went into this rental agreement back in 2012, providing access to grazing and

farm buildings. We keep the ewes at Baggrave and they are overseen by my flock manager, Chris. I'm lucky to have Chris onboard because he's dedicated, conscientious and a real credit to himself."

Charles bought the ewes off the estate when he entered into business with them and incorporated a number of his own ewes into the flock to grow the numbers. "Mixing the two flocks led us to a number of unexpected problems with disease," he says. "Both flocks had been closed for some time before mixing, but initially bringing them together was problematic.

"We spent a lot of time investigating, including through post-mortems, but never managed to get to the bottom of it. The issues slowed and stopped and all the work we did never reached a conclusive result," he reflects.

Charles says that, due to the poor land quality at Baggrave, they also have deficiency issues. "The grass isn't the best quality and we have an underlying issue with cobalt, selenium and iodine deficiency," he explains. "We tackle this with twice yearly bolusing and we drench lambs every month while they're growing. Despite the



Charles and Helen.



Charles performance records his flock.



Charles' ram lambs are selected yearly by Innovis.

difficulty, we're quite pleased with the outcomes and this year we scanned at 179% and weaned at 170%."

## Lambing

Due to his variety of breeds, lambing is dotted at different times. The lambing season begins in December with the Charollais, the Abermax lamb in March and the Lley flock at Baggrave lambs in April. "We have a yearly debate on whether we should move to outdoor lambing, but it's not one we've yet tried, and everything is housed from January/February so the land can rest ahead of turning ewes and lambs out."

Charles breeds his own replacements, aiming to keep between 350 and 400 ewes from his Baggrave flock to keep the flock closed. All the rams used are home bred.

In total he keeps 700 ewe lambs, and around 60 ram lambs, to take to shearlings and the rest of the lambs are sold on a Tesco cost-of-production contract. Charles says: "I've been on this contract since they began, and I find it helps to provide some certainty for me. By knowing the weekly price a year in advance it allows me to budget and plan my production. This also gives me a good opportunity to test my developed genetics in a commercial environment."

Due to the nature of the land, he adds that lambs need to be away by late September. "We finish everything ourselves, and aim to have 40% sold before the end of September. The other 60% will be moved onto winter forage or onto dairy farms to finish during the winter. Ideally, we need to identify more partners in the arable world to find more land to run the sheep on."

During his 20 years at Sandlands, Charles has done a lot to improve the quality of the land, but he is worried about investing at Baggrave. "At Sandlands, we've put down new leys and are currently rotating five-year rye grass and red clover mixes. This has worked well and we're satisfied with the results. But we are reluctant to invest the same at Baggrave, as it's only on an annual grazing licence."

On top of his farming enterprise, Charles keeps busy with numerous 'extracurricular' roles. "In 2012 I became the NFU livestock board chair and have also chaired the European Commission Civil dialogue group for sheep. Following that, I became the chairman of the Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAWG) in 2017, as well as the carcass classification scrutiny committee. I represent sheep, alongside sheep vet Fiona Lovatt, on the RUMA targets taskforce. More recently I've taken on a role helping develop the

## Farm facts

- Farm run across multiple holdings, with 364 ha (900 acres) in total.
- Alongside, Charollais, Lley and Abermax, Charles also runs Blue Texels for his daughter.
- Charles runs the farm with his wife, Helen, flock manager Chris, with assistance from his children and, occasionally, contract shepherds.
- Charles is aiming to future proof the business by developing a model that is not reliant on support. Currently support is received for 12% of the area farmed, accounting for 2.2% of income.

Pathway Programme – a welfare scheme that will run alongside ELMS following the phase out of BPS."

Charles has been an NSA member since 1989 and has played an active role in Eastern and Central regions, and continues to support the Eastern Region ram sales as an inspector, and sits on English Committee for Central Region. "Being involved in NSA has been beneficial to both me and my farm and I've had positive relationships with key players in the organisation, which has helped inform my work on various boards and committees."

"We finish everything ourselves, and aim to have 40% sold before the end of September. The other 60% will be moved onto winter forage or onto dairy farms to finish during the winter."

Charles Sercombe



The Abermax ewe lambs live on Charles' home farm.

# Coping with Covid-19 fallout: the legal side

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

Covid-19 has impacted on almost every area of our lives and the legal frameworks within which we operate are no exception.

Some areas of employment, supply contracts and landlord/tenant agreements have come under the spotlight.

Despite the massive effect on employment, the fundamentals of employment law in England have not changed during the pandemic. Queries from farming clients have largely been about furloughing staff, and/or potential redundancies where there are diversification projects that have been hit; and how employers can ensure that they fulfil their health and safety responsibilities to workers.

Many farmers have furloughed staff – or they are now on 'flexible furlough'. Since 1st July and until 31st October, 2020, it is possible for employers to bring back employees who were previously furloughed, on a part-time 'flexible furlough' basis. This is a welcome development for many employers.

## Conditions

But there are conditions attached, and employers will need to be careful not to ask or encourage affected employees to work during their furloughed time – even if it is to prepare something for their next working day.

Carefully worded new furlough agreements, giving the business the flexibility it needs, will need to be agreed with employees.

Where diversified farm businesses are contemplating staff redundancies, the law has not changed. Proper procedures need to be followed, a fair and reasonable process used and supporting

paperwork needs to be in place. Getting redundancy wrong can end up with an employer facing a tribunal claim.

As for health and safety, the basic law in England has also remained the same in relation to employers' health and safety responsibilities. An employer's duty is to ensure, so far as practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of employees. The 'so far as practicable' is the important bit to think about here and the Government recognises that there will be limits as to what is achievable in terms of social distancing, for example, when it comes to managing livestock treatments and field work.

One thing that all employers must have in place and keep under review is a health and safety risk assessment. This will then guide what policies and measures are put in place to ensure workers can operate in a safe environment.

A key question we have been asked is about face coverings and whether they should be compulsory. We say, as a general rule, that the less social distancing is practicable for a particular operation, the more likely that a face-covering policy may be appropriate. If this is done, employers should provide face-coverings/masks in the same way as they provide other protective clothing.

With regards to supply contracts, the basic principles of contract law still apply. If delivery of a supply contract is affected by the pandemic, parties will need to look carefully at the small print and what it says about who carries the risk of non-performance.

There are some particular issues to bear in mind, such as which addresses to use to communicate with other parties where offices are closed.

The new Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act gives struggling businesses a formal breathing space to pursue a rescue plan. It creates a

moratorium during which no legal action can be taken against a company without leave of the court, and this is in place until Wednesday 30th September 2020.

The Act also prevents suppliers from being able to rely on contractual termination or other terms to stop the supply of goods or services to a customer when that customer enters a formal insolvency procedure. We expect a greater use of repayment plans as an alternative to issuing legal proceedings.

Landlord/Tenant agreements is an area that has seen significant government intervention. For those farmers renting out residential properties, there is a stay on eviction proceedings until Sunday 23rd August (and this may be extended further).

## Moratorium

There is a moratorium in place until Wednesday 30th September on a landlord's ability to forfeit a commercial lease for non-payment of rent. This does not apply to agricultural tenancies, but there is also a halt on all court possession proceedings relating to land and buildings in place until Sunday 23rd August and this does cover agricultural tenancies.

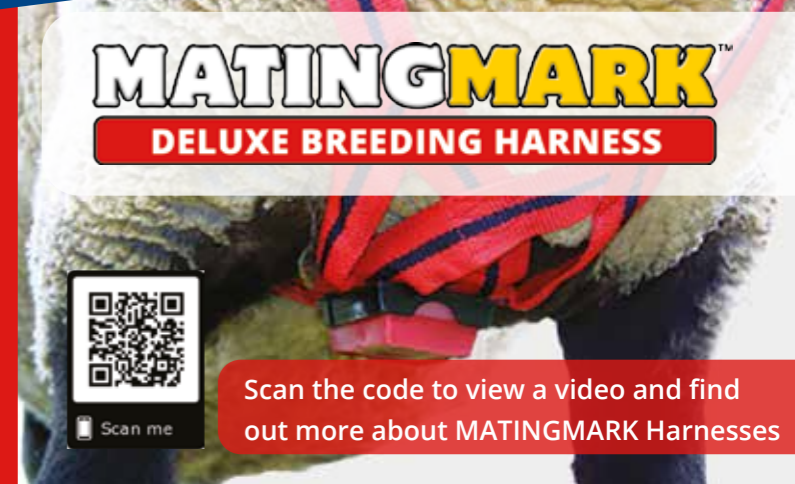
There is no right for tenants to withhold rents that are due. Any concessions need to be negotiated with landlords. The Government has issued a Code of Practice for Commercial Property Relationships. The code also applies to agricultural tenancies, but is advisory only.

It can be difficult for small farming businesses to keep up with changes, particularly in a fast-moving situation. Anyone faced with an employment claim, a landlord's demand or a customer's refusal to pay would be well-advised to take professional advice on the latest position before responding.

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**REALITY: For a limited time, receive 2 x MATINGMARK Crayons FREE with every MATINGMARK Harness you buy!**

Legal protections are in place for those impacted by Covid-19 pressures.



# Taking proactive steps during difficult times

Good weather in April and May saw an early start to the 2020 shearing season in many areas. This was particularly crucial this year because the Covid-19 lockdown resulted in a lower number of overseas shearers being able to enter the UK.

It has been encouraging to see how the industry worked together, using the Shearing Register and Checklist, to ensure an efficient shearing season. British Wool's network of UK depots and collection sites have been busy receiving wool from producers.

Maintaining a high level of service to all producers has been vital. During this period of uncertainty, it was important that British Wool implemented several measures to ensure that it remained fully operational, including the introduction of remote bidding at auctions and a cross-functional training programme designed to ensure business continuity.

## Service

These measures meant British Wool was able to continue to provide the highest levels of service across all functions within the business. As British Wool enters its 70th year of operation in the UK, and indeed the world, it faces the most severe recession in its history.

The global market for cross-bred wool has been closed since February and, at the time of writing, remained so. February to May is typically the busiest selling period of the year and, as a result, British Wool had around nine million kilogrammes of unsold stock out of a total 2019/20 clip of 27 million kilogrammes. British Wool is taking action to proactively manage business during the ongoing crisis.

During the past year it has secured the first major new buyer (more than one million kilogrammes) in the auction room for a decade. Additionally, a number of smaller buyers from China and India have also started bidding for wool at auctions. British Wool has also introduced a remote online auction, which will continue even after Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted.

In order to manage the carryover of stock, more frequent auctions will be held – one every two weeks, on average, between now and December. This will enable British Wool to offer a consistent and steady supply of British wool onto the market, once it starts to function properly again.

British Wool continues to identify opportunities in China through its Chinese office, working on new product opportunities with cloth, rug and knitwear manufacturers. Additionally, it is building on the success of a British Wool bedding range with a Chinese brand, Lovo, in 2019. It is looking at opportunities for the 2020 season.

British Wool's UK social media following has grown significantly during the past 12 months. It now has more than 100,000 followers across all of its channels, giving it an excellent platform to promote and grow its brand, promote its licensees' products (driving sales) and communicate the benefits of wool.

## Scheme

British Wool's brand licensee scheme underpins all of its marketing activity. The scheme traces the origin of the wool from the end product right the way back to the wool merchant. The scheme has been rolled out globally and currently has 44 licensees both here in the UK and in China. Producers marketing their wool through British Wool, represents the only realistic prospect of improved prices on a national scale in the medium and long term. Wool producers can be assured that British Wool, as a trusted partner, will be at the forefront of leading the growth and renewal of wool values, but this will take time. The UK wool market will emerge stronger from this period, so long as UK wool producers stay together and continue to back their organisation.



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Creating downstream global consumer demand – investing in the future of British wool	✓	✗

To find out more call us on **01274 688666**  
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Marketing opportunities will return as the Covid-19 crisis settles.



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# Keeping up with consumer marketing

## Focus on social media channels to promote Welsh lamb



August is the time of year when PGI Welsh Lamb is most readily available.

Therefore, it's the time when Welsh red meat levy body HCC launches its annual campaign to promote Welsh Lamb to consumers across the country. Covid-19 and lockdown have had an impact on both how people have been buying and consuming food, and how they're engaging with media and advertising. HCC has taken these considerations into its campaign plan for 2020, to ensure that it is targeting consumers effectively.

Data has shown that, during lockdown, more people have been cooking from scratch and have had more time to try out new recipes and dishes. HCC is providing consumers with lamb recipe inspiration to try at home, with plenty of tips on how to prepare, store and create leftover dishes.

Lockdown restrictions mean that more people have spent more time on social media and so the majority of HCC's campaign work will continue to be on social media, websites and other digital channels while outdoor events are still prohibited.

The eat welsh lamb and welsh beef website has been refreshed and is packed with new recipes and information that will appeal to home cooks. Key influencers are being utilised to target new consumers on social media, while partnerships have been formed with leading magazine titles, such as BBC Good Food, Olive and Delicious, to target foodies who are looking for new recipes and have an interest in cooking.

HCC is also working with a Welsh 'Culinary Dozen' – a set of 12 leading Welsh chefs, including Great British Menu's Hywel Griffith, Sam and Shauna from BBC's The Big Cook Out, and Michelin-starred chef Gareth Ward. The Culinary Dozen have crafted 12 exclusive recipes and videos for HCC's social media channels to inspire the masses to cook with Welsh Lamb.



## Campaign urges consumers to 'make it' with lamb



The first phase of a GB-wide campaign encouraging consumers to 'make it' with lamb launched in July.

Delivered by QMS, AHDB and HCC, it includes TV on demand, radio sponsorship, and digital and social advertising, as well as local news partnerships. It's set to reach 75% of all adults, aged between 15 and 64, in Britain. The campaign follows the extremely popular 'Make it Beef' campaign, which focused on promoting steak and roasting cuts after demand plummeted in the wake of Covid-19 due to the loss of foodservice, such as pubs and restaurants. Retail demand for premium beef cuts has increased in recent weeks and farmgate prices have stabilised. Further phases of promotion are planned for later in the year, responding to evolving market and retail conditions as the UK emerges from lockdown and begins to reopen venues for eating out.

## Advertising

Recipes featured in the first phase of advertising include quick and easy one-tray lamb chops with feta, lamb wraps, lamb and tzatziki pittas, and BBQ-friendly lamb satay skewers. Throwing his support behind the campaign is TV presenter and chef John Torode, who will help share lamb's unique flavour, high quality and versatility with consumers. A joint statement from the levy boards, says: "The 'Make It Lamb' campaign aims to drive lamb sales across the country by providing consumers with a range of new simple, delicious lamb recipes, as well as tips and ideas, perfect for family meals or summer BBQs. It's difficult to predict how demand will evolve in the second half of the year, as we reach the peak production period for lamb in the UK. We will respond as needed through engaging campaigns targeted at the most appropriate segments of the market."

## Unprecedented times call for a different marketing approach

Despite the current challenges, LMC is still providing service as usual.

"In fact, more activity has been going on since the start of lockdown came into effect and the team has had to adapt to changing consumer mind-sets during the past four months," says LMC's Chief Executive Ian Stevenson. LMC's marketing team has been busy during the lockdown period. In late March LMC launched its 'Thank you' campaign, which focused on thanking those essential workers in the agri-food industry for continuing to feed the nation during unprecedented times, driving high consumer engagement on social media. "It was an uncertain time for those in the agri-food industry and wider community, and we felt that it


was important to highlight the dedication of our key workers," says Mr Stevenson. In identifying the concerns of the industry and key stakeholders in relation to supply and demand, LMC launched its second lockdown campaign, 'Loving Local', in an attempt to encourage consumers to support local farmers. The campaign called for consumers to look for the NIFQA logo when purchasing lamb as a guarantee of traceability and provenance.

## Activity


The marketing team has just launched its latest burst of activity, the 'Taste the Summer' campaign, following a successful five-week beef campaign, 'Steakhouse Saturdays', which made more than 1.8 million impressions in Northern Ireland with

the help of local influencers. The focus is to help facilitate home cooking of locally produced Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured lamb and beef, in times when consumers are willing to learn new skills and try new foods as life slowly returns back to a 'new normal'. LMC is using technology to drive the strongest possible messages regarding Farm Quality Assured lamb to local consumers. So far LMC is pleased with the response.





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## British Wool – a truly versatile product

The British Wool licensee scheme has now been in place for almost two years. Previously, the licensing scheme was based on trust.



“But our new scheme interrogates the supply chain at every stage – right back to the wool merchants – via an on-line portal,” explains British Wool’s Graham Clark. “This ensures that products have the appropriate content of verified British wool. And, if our auditing gives cause for concern about the accuracy of the British Wool content, we will take physical samples from the supply chain to verify.” He adds that it’s good to see so many of the leading brands using wool in the UK coming on board with the new scheme. “We now have more than 50 licensees. Although Covid-19 has severely affected the current price of wool, our licensee partnerships and consumer focused marketing mean that we will be in a strong position to capitalise on opportunities once markets start to recover.” Due to its versatile nature, British wool is used in a number of products across the UK and British Wool have many of the leading brands in each field on the new scheme. These include:

- **Carpets:** The largest single user of British wool in its products is Brintons Carpets. Its products go into both the residential and the commercial market (airports, hotels, casinos, cruise ships). Approximately 50% of British wool goes into carpets.
- **Interior Textiles:** Yorkshire-based Camira Fabrics use British wool in the cloth that goes into the carriage seats on the London Underground. It uses British wool because it has more natural crimp and bounce compared to wool from other parts of the world.
- **Beds and bedding:** A unique benefit of wool is its natural ability to regulate body temperature. It is for this reason that many bed and bedding manufacturers, such as the Silentnight Group and Sleepzee, use British wool in their products.
- **Knitwear and Apparel:** Approximately 30% of British wool goes into this product category and British Wool works with many brands. Probably the most instantly recognisable is Harris Tweed.
- **Insulation:** Thermafleece is the leading brand in the UK for wool insulation for buildings and has been working with British Wool for many years on its roof, wall and floor insulation products. Because wool insulation does much more than prevent heat loss it tends to be used in situations where breathability, acoustic performance, energy efficiency, sustainability and occupant well-being are more valued. It is worth noting that wool insulation shouldn’t be seen as a direct replacement for low cost fibreglass, which is less costly to produce.

“British wool is also used in a number of highly innovative products and we have licensee partners manufacturing products, such as dog beds and boots,” adds Mr Clark. “We are always keen to find new uses for wool and are currently working with a couple of universities on new product development projects that we hope, over time, will create new markets for our producers’ wool.”

Carpets are the biggest market for British Wool.



## Sustainable red meat action groups launched

QMS has launched a series of sustainable red meat action groups aimed at livestock farmers who are keen to understand the relationship between carbon footprint, meat production and profit.



Pasture-based livestock production will be at the core of these groups, as well as benchmarking farm performance and carbon credentials. Facilitated by QMS, there will be seven groups based across Scotland and they will meet four times a year for a three-year period.

Group members will have the opportunity to visit members’ farms and hear from technical experts on topics such as grazing management, soil health and alternative livestock production systems. This will allow members to identify potential improvements they could make on their own farms.

Using easy-to-measure physical benchmarking data, the group members will also be able to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of their livestock enterprise and compare them with other group members.

## Sustainable

Building on the success of the QMS Graze + and Better Grazing programmes, which were aimed at farmers keen to learn more about improving their grazing management, the sustainable red meat action groups will allow for peer-to-peer discussion groups focused on improving individual businesses.

The first group meetings will be held later in the year, virtually or on farm once lockdown has completely eased, and QMS’ John Evans is encouraging farmers, who are keen to take grazing management to the next level, to get involved.

“Feedback from farmers who attended the QMS Better Grazing groups indicated that many were interested in looking at benchmarking and carbon audits in more detail. They were also keen to analyse the financial impact of the changes they make,” says Mr Evans.

“The opportunity to benchmark, share experiences and learn from others in the programme is set to be a hugely valuable way to help farmers optimise their businesses.”

Due to the benchmarking element of the initiative, the number of members in each of the groups will be limited. Group members will also be required to meet some key requirements, which include agreeing to undertake a carbon audit and benchmarking, and to share results within the group.

If you would like more information about these groups and are interested in joining, please contact John Evans on 07823 417598 or email [jevans@qmscotland.co.uk](mailto:jevans@qmscotland.co.uk)

## ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE



More and more UK sheep producers are taking action to stamp out lameness in their flocks, and the summer months are great time to implement the Five Point Plan to reduce sheep lameness.

Sheep flocks often suffer from a spike in lameness at this time of year, so it’s the ideal opportunity to stamp out any problems before disease becomes more established.



### Rhidian Glyn, North Wales

It was as a Farming Connect demonstration farm that Rhidian became more aware of the Five-Point Plan to reduce sheep lameness.

Rhidian started by gathering all the sheep and anything that was even slightly lame was put into an isolation group. “They were all treated appropriately immediately before being sent back out to grass, albeit still in isolation. Two weeks later they were brought back in and any that were still lame were re-treated. After another two weeks those that had recovered were returned to the main flock, those that were still lame were earmarked for culling.”

To help build immunity Rhidian also vaccinated all the ewes against footrot.

“After vaccination the improvement was quite startling. Before we vaccinated about 13% of the ewes were lame, but shortly after the first injection when I gathered the sheep again just before tupping time, incidence was down to only 3%. It seems the initial vaccination really did boost their immunity. I was pretty impressed. We now vaccinate routinely about four weeks before the peak disease risk periods.”



### Olly Matthews, North Somerset

“During the spring and summer 2018 we were definitely caught in a vicious circle. Having lambed inside, there were lame ewes and lame lambs perpetually, no matter what we did. It was really soul destroying and incredibly time consuming, especially when it came to treating lambs. We were basically fire-fighting; using lots of antibiotics – an unsustainable amount in my view – and foot bathing everything.”

“It was clear that the industry-accepted Five Point Plan was working on many farms. We decided to vaccinate sheep prior to tupping in 2018 to build their immunity to the bacteria known to cause footrot.”

As a result, there has been a dramatic transformation. “I’ve hardly seen a lame sheep on the farm since and we rarely have to turn anything over to examine feet. What’s more, we hardly use any antibiotics for lame sheep now. We used to spend at least £1,500 on antibiotic treatment, so the investment in vaccination has already paid for itself many times over. In fact, I’d go as far as to say that it’s the best return on investment we have ever had with the flock.”



### Alan and Richard Fairbairn, Worcestershire

It is in managing lame sheep that the Fairbairns have really seen a demonstrable difference to their day-to-day working lives following a vaccination policy.

“We were buying in some Suffolk cross ewes and when we quarantined them for three to four weeks we were taken aback over how badly affected their feet were with footrot. We knew immediately that we had to tighten up our lameness control programme.”

“We worked hard to make sure we were implementing all the measures set out in the Five-Point Plan to reduce sheep lameness. But our first steps were prompt antibiotic treatment of any affected ewes and culling any persistently lame sheep. We also decided to vaccinate all the ewes, with one dose in the summer and a second dose six months later pre-housing for lambing. Our culling policy and use of the vaccine in that first year made a massive difference to our ewes’ feet during the lambing season. We now vaccinate prior to peak disease risk periods.”

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The Halal market is important to lamb producers.

## Report highlights opportunities for halal meat sector

The halal meat sector is an increasingly important market in the UK, with Muslims consuming around 20% of all lamb in England alone.

According to the latest research, most halal consumers spend on average £28.50 a week on meat, compared with an average spend on meat in the UK of £12.60 per household each week.

Figures show that 60% of halal consumers eat lamb at least weekly, compared to just 6% of the whole UK population.

In 2016, the UK halal food and beverage industry was worth a staggering £4.6 billion, which is equivalent to 8% of the UK's total food and drink spend.

With these numbers expected to increase, AHDB has produced a report on the halal market to help sheep farmers and the wider industry better understand the opportunities, challenges and considerations within the UK supply chain.

The report was put together by AHDB's Consumer Insight team after commissioning research in 2019 in conjunction with HCC in Wales and QMS in Scotland.

### Consumers

The research aimed to ascertain how halal customers shop, cook and eat, and also looked at the key needs of the halal meat consumer.

"A major part of the halal food market is meat," says AHDB Consumer Insight Manager, and author of the report, Susie Stannard. "Halal consumers eat more meat per capita than the general population, which is why this research is crucial – particularly for the lamb sector.

"The report looks at everything from presentation and display of halal products within supermarkets and butchers, to upskilling for halal butchers to provide an enhanced service.

"Halal consumers are a highly engaged demographic when it comes to the meat that they buy, and they consume a diverse range of cuts and proteins. With a healthy appreciation for lamb, the UK halal meat consumer is an increasingly important market to engage with for the sheep sector," she adds.

Meat is viewed as an essential part of a main meal for halal consumers and is often the main feature. Chicken is the most commonly consumed meat, followed by lamb, beef and then mutton.

### Certification

According to the report, nine out of 10 halal consumers would like to see at least one additional type of halal meat more readily available. This shows there is scope to enhance ranges, with more choice across convenience foods, including marinades and sous vide (under vacuum) type products, according to Ms Stannard.

"But the top priority for halal consumers is that products display halal certification. That was five times more important than the retailer having a good range of options and 10 times more important than pricing."

The report also highlights the need to consider when key events are happening throughout the year – such as Ramadan, Eid-al-Fitr and Qurbani – and to see how this affects domestic supply and demand.

Aside from the usual consumption of halal

meat, peak consumption has been reported around the three key Islamic festivals that usually include family, community events and celebratory meals, where meat typically features heavily.

"The significance and timing of these festivals needs to be recognised in order to understand where demand peaks and to target marketing activities," says AHDB's Halal Sector Manager Awal Fuseini. "It is worth noting that these festivals typically fall 10 to 11 days earlier each year, due to the length of the Islamic lunar calendar."

"And there is a requirement for animals to have attained a certain minimum age to be eligible for some of the festivals, so processors need to be up to date with these requirements."

The report also looked at cooking habits for halal consumers, which change with age. More than half of 55 to 65 year olds cook from scratch, compared with less than 40% of 18 to 24 year olds.

More than two-thirds of halal consumers enjoy experimenting with different recipes and food. But second and third generation Muslims are more open to trying different cuisines than first generations.

"This shows that there are opportunities to inspire a younger generation with new and innovative dishes that are quick and easy to prepare to fit in with their busy lifestyles," adds Dr Fuseini.

To see the entire report visit the AHDB website: [www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/consumer-insights-demand-for-halal-meat](http://www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/consumer-insights-demand-for-halal-meat).



### Steven and Lizzie Walker

Anderton Fold Farm, Preston.

We run our commercial sheep flock alongside our pedigree Hereford Herd - Hoghton View Herefords. In 2016 as flock numbers had increased to around 1000 breeding ewes we had a long hard look at our current system, to ensure that we were moving forward in the right way. We were running a very traditional commercial flock of North of England Mules and Texel cross ewes, put to Texel x Beltex Tups. After accessing the farms capabilities (a good but wet lowland grass growing farm) we came up with the following to focus on:

- Tup longevity and activity - Self replacing Ewe flock - Ewes that would milk from grass alone
- Easy lambing, birth wool, lamb vigor - Medium frame sheep - Clean white headed sheep that would attract Ewe customers

After researching different breeds and options, we felt that the Logies breeding would be a great way of introducing these assets to our flock. This years scanning percentage was 183% with tups in for just 2 cycles. We lamb outside from April 10th, with only triplet ewes receiving any

concentrates. The Logie lambs are easy born and quickly up sucked. All male lambs are finished on farm with the Logie x lambs grading out constantly 20 to 22kg R/U3L. The young Logie x ewes are everything we wanted, a smart medium sized ewe, excellent milky mothers who are easy fleshed from grass, the surplus ewe lambs or yearlings are proving popular and good to sell We are happy we are breeding the right type of sheep for our farm and the modern low maintenance ewe the industry requires.



### Demand for easily managed ewes in the future

There is a huge demand for breeding females to suit outdoor and indoor lambing flocks, as there is a big shift from traditional breeds and systems to new more productive breeds.

The Logie is the perfect breed to manage in high numbers producing R and U grade lambs. It is easy to upgrade the flock you currently run into a Logie flock and sell surplus females at a big premium to new flocks. After using rams for a couple of years your replacements will look like Logies and you can sell females. Also they can be run as a pure breed without any crossing to achieve market spec and cut input costs.

Logie Durno Sheep  
quality bred in

# Make time to explore forage and grassland reseeding options

For those challenged with producing enough forage for their flocks through the drought of 2018 and flooding of 2019, the need for resilient systems that are better able to tolerate extreme seasons is a hot topic across the sheep sector.

There is no single magic wonder crop. However, there are options for broadening forage types and species grown on farm to make the best use of available resources, depending on each individual farm's requirements and circumstances.

With many farms moving away from relying on grass-only swards, research into mixed species or herbal leys has shown promising results. Deeper rooting plants are more drought tolerant and mine their own minerals, which reduces fertiliser applications and associated costs, and the environmental impact. At the same time, this promotes lamb growth rates that rival standard perennial ryegrass leys with the addition of further nutritional benefits.

## Legumes

There is increased pressure to reduce greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions and adding legumes to swards minimises these emissions by reducing the need for applied nitrogen and increasing feed conversion efficiency, which also reduces methane production.

Clover is not the only nitrogen fixing legume available. Sainfoin, whether in a mixture or grown alone, is a deep rooting, mineral-rich perennial species that produces palatable conserved forage. It also contains condensed tannins, which play an anthelmintic role in the

gut. Sainfoin can also provide one or two cuts of hay or silage, as well as late season grazing, which is useful in a dry summer when high temperatures can lead to grass dormancy.

Lucerne is another perennial legume, grown extensively on the continent, that produces high-protein forage. It can be grown with sainfoin or straight (usually the case in the UK) or in a multi-species sward. Again, it offers quality protein, minerals and some resilience in dry seasons.

Legumes prefer warm soil for the development of the nodule inhabiting rhizobial bacteria and are best sown by mid-August, with plenty of light and warmth, in order to develop in time for productive spring growth. They also require a soil pH of 6 or above, with sainfoin preferring a pH of 7.

Care must be taken to ensure the right soil conditions for establishment with sufficient soil moisture within the top 2.5cm and a fine, firm tilth to provide good seed-to-soil contact. An inoculant of the right strain of rhizobium may also be needed.

Other deep rooting plants include chicory and ribwort plantain (ribgrass). These promote good lamb growth rates, bringing up minerals and withstanding drier conditions. Chicory also contains condensed tannins.

Grasses, such as cocksfoot and the new festuloliums (hybrid of ryegrass and fescue), provide dense root systems that also offer some resilience in drier conditions.

Perennial ryegrass continues to be the most versatile and consistent species when well-managed. It suits most growing conditions, including wetter seasons, and can be established into September. New varieties are added to the Recommended Grass and Clover List every year, with yields increasing by 10% and quality by 5% during the past 10 years.

By Ellie Sweetman, NIAB



This means that the newer varieties produce higher yield and quality without increased nutrient input, so are more cost effective to grow. High sugar varieties also increase protein utilisation in the rumen, so work well with legumes in the mixture.

Variety selection should be based on the timing of required growth. The Recommended List trials system measures seasonal growth, as well as conservation and simulated grazing yields and quality. Selecting a mixture of species to provide flexibility is useful with more vigorous growth of tetraploids balanced with the persistence of diploid varieties. The inclusion of clovers to minimise nutrient input and increase protein levels should also be considered.

## Renovations

Before carrying out sward renovations, farmers should dig holes to assess soil structure, across both productive and poor areas of the field, and compare these with the soil structure under a nearby ungrazed hedgerow. This will show how well the soil biology is functioning. Compaction can be an issue, restricting root development, which impacts on plant growth and resilience in both dry and wet conditions.

The presence of moss can also indicate nutrient deficiency, particularly phosphorus. Moss grows due to lack of competition from the required species, typically a result of either the nutrients not being present or the roots being unable to access them due to poor development or compaction restrictions.

A detailed soil analysis will identify any minerals that may be lacking and allow targeted applications. Sulphur and molybdenum are particularly important for legume development. Magnesium can be a limiting factor. Soil pH significantly affects the availability of trace



Selecting a mixture of species offers flexibility.

elements, such as manganese and zinc. Sodium is also important for palatability. Refer to the Nutrient Management Guide (RB209) or a FACTS qualified adviser to interpret soil analyses into a nutrient management plan, to give both existing swards and reseeded the best chance to reach their potential.

Compaction issues, from livestock and/or machinery, can seriously restrict plants reaching their potential and may be improved with aeration rather than deeper, more damaging cultivations. Tightness in the topsoil can also be a symptom of low soil magnesium.

Alleviating soil structural issues and addressing pH and competition from weeds may be all that is necessary to increase sward productivity if the sward has more than 50% of desirable species present. However, where these species are at, or below, 50% of the sward, investment in reseeding provides a good return within the first year of production if done well.

When it comes to renovation, slot seeding or broadcasting seed onto existing swards is less expensive than a full reseed and reduces a field's time out of use. To ensure successful establishment, larger seeded tetraploid varieties of ryegrasses, which have rigorous early growth, are usually used although they are less persistent than the diploid varieties so this may be a relatively short-term solution.

## Species

This can be a good way to increase other species into the sward, but it is critical to minimise competition from the existing species so swards must be tightly grazed or cut immediately prior to sowing.

Where a full reseed is the best option, minimum tillage will cause less disturbance to soil fauna and existing root structures and retain more organic matter, moisture and nutrients as well as reducing opportunities for pests, such as leatherjackets, to establish themselves. Ploughing can be worth doing if a clean seedbed is necessary, alleviating perennial weeds and surface compaction.

Farmer groups, such as the Soil Association's FAB farmers in the south-west and Innovative Farmers' groups, provide opportunities to see how different mixed swards are performing around the country through on-farm research.

Also it is worth looking into The British Grassland Society and the regional grass societies' useful and interesting farm walks. The GrassCheck GB website provides useful information on grass growth around the country.

Technical information on including mixed swards and legume crops can also be found on seed companies' websites. These are all worth tapping into for guidance on making the most of your swards, along with handy guides to soil assessment on the AHDB and NIAB websites.



## Highlander and Primera Top New Zealand genetics, bred in the UK.

"We have introduced a criss cross breeding programme with the Aberfield and Highlander maternal line"



"The B flock is put to the Primera meat sire and a Continental terminal sire. The Primera cross lambs are hardy, very quick to suck and they're reaching 19kg target finished weight earlier - from 14 weeks, solely from grazed grass and with the entire crop grading within the R specification, or better."

"I'm quite happily running rams at a ratio of one to 80 and 80% of the flock is lambing within the first three weeks, in view of the fact the rams are demonstrating such virility that I would happily increase the number of ewes put to one ram."

Andrew Marchant, Thornhill, Dumfriesshire (2020)  
Using Highlander and Primera New Zealand genetics.



"We've swapped a 350-ewe flock of Suffolk cross and Texel cross ewes for Highlanders and seen the scan increase from 150% to this season's 183%."

"Ram to ewe ratio has stepped up, we run 100 ewes with one ram and 75% of the flock lamb within the first two weeks, whilst mature ewe weight has reduced from an average 75kg to 60kg and subsequently helped us to increase stocking rate."

"The Highlander ewes make very good mothers. They require very little, if any intervention at lambing and after turn out they take their lambs with them, they are very protective which is one reason why I like the Highlander so much - we run the unit with minimum labour."

"We're also achieving more, better quality lambs. Pure Highlander wethers and ewe lambs not kept for replacement purposes are going on to finish off grass at 18kg to 20kg from 14 weeks."

Daniel Balment, Barnstaple, Devon (2020)  
Using Highlander New Zealand Genetics.



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Sheep enjoying the benefits of grazing a mixed sward.





# Working towards developing a louping ill vaccine

Moredun Research Institute and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust are working together to tackle the problem of louping ill in sheep (also known as Ovine Encephalomyelitis) and in red grouse.

Moredun developed an effective vaccine in the 1930s, which was a game changer for many hill sheep farmers and grouse moor managers. But this vaccine was recently withdrawn from manufacture.

Louping ill is an acute viral disease that is transmitted by ticks and affects the central nervous system of warm-blooded animals. Although principally found in sheep and red grouse, louping ill can occasionally also cause disease in humans, cattle, horses, goats, dogs, pigs, llamas, and alpacas.

When a sheep becomes infected, the virus enters the bloodstream in a high concentration. It is not until the virus has multiplied in the brain, some six to 10 days after infection, that some sheep will show clinical signs of the disease. These include nervousness, difficulty in walking, paralysis, coma and death. Similar signs of disease are seen in infected red grouse. Between 5% and 60% of infected sheep may develop clinical signs, but it is not clear why the outcome of infection is so variable.

## Vaccine

"We have had many reports from our hill farming members that they have been losing sheep, mainly ewe hogs, to louping ill," says Moredun's Beth Wells. "Some are losing up to 25% of their replacement females, which is a severe blow."

Research carried out at Moredun, under the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme, has identified potential components for a new generation louping ill vaccine. This now requires further research to ensure these components cause an immune response in sheep

and that this response will protect the animals against louping ill.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust galvanised the generosity of Scottish estate owners to allow this research to be carried out at Moredun. "Sheep need to be in good health if they are to continue to be an important part of moorland conservation and the rural economy," says the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Adam Smith.

The project is due to start this year and will be led by Moredun's David Griffiths. If successful, the potential vaccine will be pushed towards commercialisation as soon as possible.

There are at least 20 species of ticks indigenous to the UK, with the most common being Ixodes ricinus, otherwise known as the sheep tick. The sheep tick is the main vector for louping ill and a number of other diseases that affect livestock, such as tick borne fever, redwater fever (babesiosis), and tick pyaemia. Ticks become infected with louping ill virus when they feed on a host animal that was already infected by a previous tick bite. The virus establishes itself in the salivary gland of the tick, allowing it to be injected into the host during feeding. Ticks have four main stages in their lifecycle: egg, larvae, nymph and adult. After hatching, the larvae attach themselves to passing animals or birds, feeding on their blood for between two and three days.

When complete, the larvae fall to the ground and moult into nymphs that, typically, do not feed again until the following year. After feeding for between five and seven days, the nymphs moult into adults. The next year, adult ticks will feed for about 10 days after attaching to a new host before producing egg masses from which the next generation of larvae emerge. This whole process takes three years and only about 20 days of this is spent feeding. Although ticks are found throughout the UK, they require a warm and damp environment to survive between feeding stages. As a result, they are commonly found in dense vegetation mat such as those found in upland

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun  Moredun

pastures – heather, bracken and permanent pasture – and woodland floors.

## Infestations

Tick infestations are, therefore, of significant importance to hill sheep production with animal welfare concerns resulting from irritation, anaemia and risk of disease transmission, as well as economic losses resulting from disease outbreaks. Tick infestations are also a public health concern, due to the risks and effects of Lyme disease and other zoonotic diseases. In recent years, tick numbers have increased and have expanded into areas where ticks have not historically been a problem. Factors that may be contributing to this include:

- Climate change, particularly relatively wet summers
- Sheep farming economics and a reduction in sheep dipping
- More woodland and scrub vegetation and less hard-grazed pasture
- Local increases in deer numbers, which act as tick maintenance hosts

Tick borne diseases have spread with the ticks and, without a louping ill vaccine, serious losses have been reported in both sheep and red grouse in some areas.

Sheep and grouse that survive infection develop sufficient antibodies in their blood to provide a good level of louping ill immunity for the rest of their lives. In sheep this immunity is passed on efficiently in colostrum, ensuring that lambs can be well protected for the first six to eight weeks of life. Although all ages of sheep are susceptible, it is mainly lambs and yearlings retained for breeding that become clinically affected. When disease is suspected, veterinary advice should be sought to confirm a diagnosis.

*'Best practice guidelines for louping ill virus control in sheep flocks and on grouse moors in the absence of a vaccine' is free to view and download via the following link: <https://bit.ly/LIV-best-practice>*

# Prevent enzootic abortion or prepare for future losses.

Enzootic abortion (EAE) costs the UK sheep industry an estimated **£20 million annually**<sup>1</sup>.

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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](http://www.ceva.co.uk)



Ensure your stock is prepared for heather grazing.



# Examining alternative ram sourcing routes

TECHNICAL

There has been widespread disruption to how rams are sourced this year due to Covid-19 and social distancing restrictions, leading to some breeding sales moving online.

But when seeing the rams for sale 'in the flesh' is impossible, how do buyers know what they are getting?

Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) have an important role to play when finding the best rams. "In fact, using terminal sire rams with high EBVs can add between £3 and £5 additional value to every lamb sired in commercial flocks," says AHDB's Signet Breeding Manager Sam Boon. "Using EBVs helps to ensure that, however rams are sourced, sheep farmers are getting the best rams to suit their system."

To make finding performance-recorded rams that are for sale even easier, Signet Breeding Services launched a 'sheep for sale' page on Signetdata.com. There is a choice of hundreds of rams from many breeds.

EBVs provide an independent assessment of

an animal's genetic merit for a specific trait, so sheep farmers can compare animals directly and fairly. To quickly find the right ram for each flock, breeding indexes are created, using the EBVs, to enable rams to be ranked for a specific breeding goal. Typically, the higher the index the better the ram. "EBVs can still be used individually to help refine ram selection further and to match the rams that are available to the requirements of the flock," adds Mr Boon.

## Performance

EBVs can make a significant difference when it comes to flock performance. "EBVs can be used to select rams that will boost on-farm productivity by siring lambs and ewes with improved performance. And, because these gains are the result of improved genetics, the benefits can be achieved without any extra inputs or cost."

The most profitable sires for finishing lambs are those that increase lamb value or allow them to be sold earlier in the season. "The RamCompare project, jointly funded by AHDB, looks at ram performance in these areas,

By Sarah Measom, AHDB Beef & Lamb



comparing the performance of lambs sired by different performance recorded rams," says Mr Boon.

"A key finding was the importance of selecting the best rams within a breed because, in most instances, the genetic variation within a breed is as great as that observed between different breeds."

Although most of the rams in RamCompare were in the top 20% of the breed, there were large differences between the sire's progeny performance. In terms of carcass weight, there was a 1kg per lamb difference in carcass deadweight between sires (equivalent to £4/lamb), on all farms. And there was also a 20-day difference in average days to slaughter of a ram's progeny seen on every farm.

"When multiplied across a farm, these benefits make a significant impact on flock profitability and are simply achieved by selecting high-index rams with good EBVs for scan weight, muscle depth and CT lean weight," says Mr Boon.

"Selecting the best rams to produce productive ewes is arguably more complex,"



The ideal maternal ewe needs to be prolific.

he adds. "But the potential rewards are far greater with benefits expressed across many generations. Identifying rams with superior genetics for maternal traits is essential, but can be a challenge as many important maternal traits are not expressed by the ram and can't be judged by looks alone.

"The 'ideal' maternal ewe arguably needs to be prolific, milky, and not excessively large, but still produce fast growing lambs with good carcasses. EBVs and indexes can be used to

enhance all of these attributes to find the best rams to sire female replacements.

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# Time treatments correctly to tackle resistance

The volume of Group 4-AD (orange) and Group 5-SI\* (purple) wormers used on flocks doubled in the two years following the change in classification, which meant that sheep farmers could obtain them through their vet or merchant, via a qualified adviser.

As SCOPS continues to urge sheep farmers to strike a careful balance between harnessing the benefits of Group 4-AD and 5-SI wormers while protecting them from overuse, it's time for an update.

During the past year there has been a steady increase in volume of the Group 4-AD and 5-SI wormers used, and overall sheep farmers seem to be using them in line with SCOPS advice. But there is still a long way to go before the majority of farmers use these products correctly to sustain effective worm control, so we must all keep up the good work.

The message to use these wormers once a year in lambs is getting through, although there is concern that some farmers are trying to use the once-a-year dose too early in the season, and this could be a major issue in 2020. Record-breaking sunshine, and no rain in May, has left many farms short of grass, and this is driving farmers to consider weaning lambs early.

Many associate this dose with weaning and often this is not the ideal time, even in

a normal year, because this dose needs to clear out anthelmintic-resistant worms left by previous drenches.

## Resistance

The aim is to remove worms that have survived previous treatments with the older wormer groups (1-BZ, 2-LV and/or 3-ML). This helps to slow the development of resistance by killing the accumulation of surviving worms in the lambs and boosting lamb performance.

Farmers need to wait until later in the summer, when lambs may have had several doses of other wormers, to gain from this. At weaning many flocks are only part way there, so farmers must be careful and not 'jump the gun'.

'Dose and move' is a potential pitfall. If sheep are to be treated and then moved to low-risk pasture, SCOPS would typically suggest leaving some lambs untreated. But this annual dose should be given to all lambs. The most practical option is to drench and then leave the lambs on the original dirty grazing for four or five days after treatment before moving. This will avoid taking only resistant worms with the lambs.

The use of Group 4-AD and 5-SI wormers as a quarantine treatment, or as an annual lamb dose, is an important part of a sustainable worm control strategy. While most sheep farmers are aware that anthelmintic resistance (AR) is an issue to the industry, some are still not aware that it is affecting their own flock. Every flock is at risk and regular drench tests

and discussions with your vet or adviser is key to maintaining good worm control.

That said, there is another group of sheep farmers who may have done some anthelmintic efficacy testing and now believe they have 'triple resistance'. They think they can no longer use Groups 1-BZ, 2-LV or 3-ML and are turning to Group 4-AD and 5-SI wormers groups on a more regular basis. And this is a concern.

Unfortunately, such farms do exist, and they need detailed veterinary advice. In reality, though, many who think they have triple resistance are jumping to this conclusion without enough reliable evidence. A few random drench tests, possibly without ensuring the dose is given accurately, is not sufficient evidence to say a farm is triple resistant.

## Effectively

There are different worm species involved at different times of year and, in most flocks, we find that a group 1-BZ, 2-LV or 3-ML can still be used effectively at certain times if the full AR status of the farm is known.

If you think you are in this group then talk to your vet and/or adviser about how you can look more closely at the AR status on your farm before you find yourself relying heavily on the newer wormer groups.

\* Group 5 wormers are still only available from your vet via a Special Import Certificate issued by the VMD.

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



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Targeted treatments can help ensure flock longevity.

# Piecing together the complex joint ill 'jigsaw'

By Fiona Lovatt and Phillipa Page, Flock Health Ltd 

If lambing was kind to you this year then memories of it are probably already fading and the focus is now on getting lambs away or managing grass growth.

But, if lambing went badly because you were lambing early in the persistent rain or your necessary lambing staff didn't arrive, or you had an outbreak of joint ill, then the memories will still be raw and will not be erased until well after the passing of a happier lambing season.

Joint ill is one of the lambing challenges that tests both seasoned sheep farmers and vets alike. Sporadic in nature and caused by different combinations of several reasons, it is a frustrating disease that a few people will tell you was particularly bad in 2020.

## Challenge

We have heard of high numbers of joint ill cases from farmers who were lambing indoors in February, after housing the ewes more than a month earlier than usual due to the heavy rain. After a prolonged housing period in damp conditions, it is not difficult to understand how the bacterial challenge in the shed might mount.

But this year we have also spoken to shepherds who were lambing outside in those beautifully sunny months of March and April and who also had a problem. We have, tentatively, wondered if the high number of joint ill cases in these outside

lambing flocks could be attributed to the heavily pregnant ewes seeking out the small patches of shade and lying around in groups in dusty areas of the field.

Conventional wisdom suggested that joint ill was simply a disease of poor hygiene in the lambing shed, with control primarily consisting of dipping lambs' navels in strong iodine. Just a few conversations with shepherds, who either lamb outdoors or who keep fastidiously clean lambing sheds and are obsessive about navel dipping but still face too many stiff and hobbling lambs, soon convinced us that the reality is much more complicated.

Now more comfortable with video calling, the world seems smaller and so, in June, we took advantage of zoom technology to catch up with Anne Ridler, a New Zealand-based vet who, 10 years ago, was teaching vet students at the Royal Vet College.

While she was here, Anne supervised a PhD student studying joint ill in some Welsh flocks and, more recently, she has also written about the details of a joint ill outbreak in a New Zealand flock at lambing.

We have also been in touch with Canadian, Norwegian and Spanish vets, as well as researchers at the University of Liverpool. All are, or have been, contributing to better understanding joint ill and its causes.

Gradual piecing together of all the currently available evidence suggests that sources of the joint-ill bug, *Streptococcus dysgalactiae*, may include the ewe's birth canal and her milk. We know that

the bug survives for up to six weeks on straw at cold temperatures and that cases tend to increase as lambing progresses.

Typically, within an affected flock, there are particular groups of ewes or lambing areas where there are higher numbers of cases. And it will be no surprise to learn that joint ill affects lamb growth rates and mortality (by 54g a day and 10% in the Kiwi study). There are often additional management factors, such as the application of tags or rings for castration or tailing, that seem to precipitate actual disease. But this is definitely a disease that is exacerbated by a myriad of different factors.

## Concerning

A number of researchers said that joint ill is a disease that 'waxes and wanes' within flocks and that just because a flock has a high number of cases one year, there is no guarantee that there will be outbreaks in subsequent years.

It is concerning that a number of UK shepherds start giving antibiotic injections to baby lambs when they have a high joint ill year and then they continue this every subsequent year because they are too scared to stop.

They attribute the fact that they have low joint ill levels some years to this prophylactic use of antibiotic without realising that low numbers of cases of joint ill can be the norm without blanket treatments.

To further unravel the complexities of joint ill, we decided to pull together a working group Lamb JIGSAW (Joint Ill Group Septic Arthritis



Joint ill is a disease that waxes and wanes in flocks.

Awareness). The aim of this group is to improve the control of joint ill and its consequences to lamb welfare, to promote the responsible use of antibiotics, and to reduce unnecessary costs due to joint ill on UK sheep farms.

The group will have two parts – one of interested UK sheep farmers, vets and consultants with the main aim of raising awareness of

good practice principles and agreeing how to standardise and collate farm records to establish the real impact of the joint ill. The second part aims to coordinate ongoing international research activities to ensure collaboration and synergy and to maximise the impact of any available funding.

The farmer JIGSAW group has already met via Zoom and our first activity is to distribute the

survey that the University of Liverpool has issued.

Please complete the survey at: [www.liverpool.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/joint-ill-risk-factors-survey](http://www.liverpool.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/joint-ill-risk-factors-survey) regardless of whether your flock has an issue with joint-ill outbreaks. It should take between 15 and 20 minutes to complete and there is a prize draw to thank respondents for their time.

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Management factors can play a key role in precipitating the disease.



# Rigorous measures needed for effective control of OPA

By Emily Francis, VetPartners **vetPartners**

Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA) is an infective lung tumour caused by the Jaagsiekte virus. It can be difficult to diagnose and has no treatment, making it a challenge to control once it takes hold within a flock.

The virus is mostly spread by secretions from the nose and mouth, but it can also be passed from ewes to lambs via milk and colostrum. It can survive in buildings for up to two months, so sheep can pick it up from the environment, particularly feed troughs.

It typically takes between three and four years for an infected animal to show symptoms, by which time they are likely to have spread the disease to several others within the flock. So this makes disease prevention vital.

OPA is typically introduced into a flock by an infected animal, either when buying in replacement ewes, or a new ram. Initially it spreads slowly, so farmers may notice a gradual increase in ewe deaths or decreased scanning rates.

Poor body condition scores (BCS), coughing and liquid coming from the nose and mouth are all

possible signs. But these non-specific symptoms could be caused by other diseases and it is important to get a diagnosis.

There are no blood tests for OPA, and it is usually confirmed by post-mortem. It is also possible to scan chests to detect the tumours.

Once OPA has been diagnosed, control is multifaceted. Initial control is, unfortunately, through targeted culling.

## Tumours

Culling decisions can be based on BCS, with any ewe older than four years with a low BCS culled, or a vet can come and chest scan to identify developing tumours.

In addition to culling, there are preventative steps that can be taken to reduce spread of the virus within a flock.

Careful management during lambing, particularly when ewes are housed, is essential. Separating thin ewes from the rest of the flock can also reduce the spread, as can thorough disinfection of troughs and the environment. Raising troughs higher from the ground can also help reduce the amount of secretions that build up.

Ewes with OPA often die from a secondary infection, such as bacterial pneumonia, rather than the tumour itself. Vaccinating against

## Tackling an OPA outbreak

I recently managed a significant OPA outbreak that demonstrated the impact of this tricky-to-manage disease. The South Downs-based farm has 800 north county mules, grazed on permanent pasture. The farmer initially contacted Westpoint Farm Vets with concerns about a high mortality rate during winter and lambing time.

- Between December 2018 and May 2019, 80 ewes were lost – 12.5% of the flock.
- Ewes had been in good condition at tupping, but by lambing 2019 they were thin despite being fed a generous concentrate ration. Some had a BCS at 1.5 – well below their target score of 3.
- In December 2018, the flock scanned at 130%, but 180% or above is the usual target for mules.

As the ewes had poor body condition and the problems had occurred during winter, our first step was to rule out liver fluke. Once the blood and dung samples confirmed liver fluke was not the issue, we investigated other options. Some of the ewes had runny noses and there was a noticeable cough within the flock, which implied either bacterial pneumonia, MV or OPA. As there were no specific symptoms, we decided to euthanise a particularly poor looking ewe and carried out a post-mortem. We found large areas of grey discoloration across her lungs, which had the appearance of an OPA tumour, and this was later confirmed by tissue testing. After discussion with the farmer, we decided to cull based on BCS and age. Approximately 300 ewes were culled in 2019. Thin ewes were also separated at lambing to reduce the spread of the virus. The control measures have been successful, as the flock achieved a scanning percentage of 171% in December 2019 and a much-reduced ewe mortality rate – a massive improvement compared to the previous year. But we cannot be complacent, as it takes years of robust control measures to fully eradicate OPA from a flock.



A lung tumour - the result of OPA.

pasteurella can, therefore, extend the life of the ewes. AHDB estimates that OPA is present in up to 5.6% of UK flocks but, in reality, this could be higher. The cause of unexpected ewe deaths often go undiagnosed.

With no blood test or accreditation scheme for OPA, it is impossible to guarantee that it is not

going to be introduced to a flock when buying in new stock. So it is vital to keep thorough flock records, including mortalities, BCS and scanning percentage rates. This can help identify gradual changes, such as increases in mortality rates. If the data shows that something is not quite right, carrying out post-mortems on cull ewes can be

a cost-effective way of checking for underlying issues.

Some flocks opt for cull ewe screening, which gives the opportunity to test for diseases like Johne's, maedi visna (MV), CLA, borders disease, and OPA. All have non-specific symptoms that make them difficult to diagnose.



Liquid coming from the nose and mouth is a typical sign of OPA.



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# Pre-tupping checklist can pay dividends at lambing

Ewe nutrition in the pre-tupping period is often overlooked in the sheep farming calendar. So Cargill ruminant specialist Donald MacLeod is urging sheep farmers to review diets and management, as ewe condition at this stage can affect their productivity in the forthcoming lambing season.

"Mid-summer into early autumn is a busy period on many farms and ewes are often just 'ticking over' on perhaps some of the not-so-good grazing land," he says. "The fresh forages having been 'reserved' for finishing lambs on some units.

"But the nutrition of ewes at this time can have a huge effect on fertility and, consequently, the number of lambs born. And conception rates are critical to ensure that the lambing season is not spread too widely."

## Ovulation

Ewes body condition at tupping is key to ovulation and conception rates. If ewes were a bit on the lean side and had limited energy in their diets during summer then rates could be affected. The ideal for body condition score (BCS) for lowland ewes would be 3.5, and at least 2.5 for hill breeds.

Weather and forage quality, and availability, are the main determinants that will affect ewe condition and subsequent lambing percentage.

"In 2018, we had a long dry summer with above

average temperatures. Grass dried up and was of limited and poor quality. This was blamed for poor lambing percentages in spring 2019 in many parts of the country," says Mr MacLeod.

"So far, in 2020, we've also had some prolonged spells of relatively hot weather with sustained periods above 20°C, combined with high humidity. This can begin to have an impact on ewe performance in the run up to tupping."

Like all ruminants, sheep can suffer from heat stress that can affect fertility. While not obvious now, this can be attributed to more barren ewes or lower than expected scanning and lambing

percentages later on.

The most critical factor on most farms, when it comes to ewe condition pre tupping, is the availability and quality of forage. Sustained dry periods will slow or even halt grass growth.

And although some decent rain late summer, before tupping, will spur on grass growth, it may not be enough to boost the energy and protein to levels that provide adequate nutrition for a rising plane of nutrition. "It's advisable to avoid guessing, but to ask your feed adviser to get some grazing grass samples analysed and confirm the dry matter, energy and protein levels.

## Six-point checklist to prepare ewes for tupping

- **Forage check.** Review grass growth and the availability of grazing. Grass is always the cheapest source of energy and protein available on farm, so it is key to check both quantity and quality available in the run up to tupping. Insufficient energy and protein in the ewe's diet at this stage can be costly in terms of conception rates, with more ewes bearing singles or even barren. Farmers should resist holding off introducing supplementary forage, particularly if the grass has dried up, or is limited. Providing extra forage in these situations will inevitably be cost-effective in the long run. And ask your advisor to check the forage minerals too, particularly if a deficiency has been picked up and been treated in the flock in previous years.
- **Check body condition:** Ewes should have a body condition score (BCS) between 3 and 3.5 for lowland ewes and at least 2.5 for hill breeds. This should be checked regularly and at least three months before tupping – any less and there will not be time to alter it before tupping. Also overfat ewes may experience poor conception rates. This BCS should be maintained throughout pregnancy. Feeding ewes to put on condition post tupping is a big 'no' as it is not beneficial to the ewe, the lambs or to colostrum quality.
- **Water supply.** These ewes could be grazing in dry, warm conditions. They need plenty of fresh clean water where they graze to help avoid problems associated with heat stress.
- **Feed blocks in the right place:** Supplementary feed in the way of feed blocks that can provide extra energy and protein should be near water stations. It is vital that the ewe's nutritional requirements are met as her demands increase. This avoids her drawing energy supplies off her body and a fall in condition, and ensures a rising plane of nutrition as tupping approaches.
- **Added minerals, trace elements and vitamins:** Ewes will get some supplies of these from forages and some from the feed blocks, but it is worth topping up. Specific pre-tup minerals or mineralised buckets are readily available, or a mineral drench may be the easiest solution on farm.
- **Tup/Ram condition:** Don't forget about the tups. They need to be 100% fit for action. As well as forages, they need a high quality tup ration. Ram condition can have a bearing on conception rates. A BCS of 4 minimum should be the aim for tups. A physical 'MOT' of feet, teeth and testicles is always useful to make sure they're in tip top condition. All four feet should be sound and checked for issues such as footrot in the run up to tupping to allow time for treatment. And tooth loss can mean reaching the ideal BCS may be more difficult. Testicles should be checked to make sure they are firm to the touch and free of lumps. It takes seven weeks approximately for sperm to be produced, so these checks need to be done in plenty of time, otherwise conception rates can be affected.

Preparation will help ensure stronger lambs.



Look at ewe condition three months before tupping.

Any supplementary feeding can then be more accurate," adds Mr MacLeod.

## Supplementing

Mid-to late summer – three months before the expected tupping date – is the key time to look at ewe condition and to consider supplementing their diets to make sure they're fit and healthy come tupping time.

Quality hay or haylage, or even good quality big bale silage, are the 'go to' forages that can support the available grazing. And a proprietary feed

supplement block is recommended to provide additional energy, protein, minerals and vitamins.

A three-month lead in to tupping is the required window for changing feeding practices that will allow extra condition to be put on ewes safely.

It takes up to eight weeks to change BCS by one point (which is approximately 10% of bodyweight), and it may require as much as an extra 10MJ per day throughout this period to effect this change.

So a little time spent checking the flock now should pay off in the following months. And a six-

point checklist is a useful guide on many sheep farms from July up until tupping (see panel).

"Preparing ewes ahead of tupping is an insurance and minimises the risks later on," says Mr MacLeod. "Just as the combine might be checked well before harvest, sheep – including ewes and rams – also need a check before the breeding season. Preparing well at this stage will pay dividends next spring. Like any insurance, you can skip all or part of it. But that's a high risk strategy and one that, with just a little time, doesn't need to be taken."

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# Following the flock

We catch up with NSA Eastern Region Chairman Dan Phipps, Suffolk; NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths, Devon; NSA South East Region committee member Martyn Fletcher, Wiltshire; NSA Scottish Region Chairman Jen Craig, Lanarkshire; and NSA Northern Region Chairman Thomas Carrick, Cumbria.

## Jen Craig

NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Lanarkshire



Lambing during the lockdown wasn't a lot different to a 'normal' lambing, as it turns out. Our local farm stores, vets and shops all offered a delivery service, which was brilliant to keep us supplied with everything we needed, and the weather was nothing short of perfect for the hill lambing.

Lambing in a T-shirt in sunshine is almost unheard of for us. Usually we're in several layers, with the occasional day of snow.

As a result of the good weather and lack of rain, we did struggle with grass growth and were feeding our field ewes for between three and four weeks longer than we typically would to keep their milk up.

What seemed to be a good lambing has proved to be the case, as we marked the hill lambs at the beginning of June and have more lambs per heft this year.

The majority of our lambs are sold as stores, so we'll be relying on the lamb price staying strong for the rest of the summer for the buyers going into the store sales later in September.

It's been a very odd summer so far. No Highland Show, and the smaller local shows also cancelled, has been a big miss for me and the whole industry. The sudden venture into virtual meetings has proved beneficial, but the impact of a lack of face-to-face meetings and the usual summer socialising shouldn't be overlooked.

As I'm writing we're battling the rain to get the sheep clipped. Hopefully, by the time you're reading this, we'll be finished and I'll be able to make some more video calls to catch up with people or maybe even have a socially-distanced coffee with one or two of them.

Good weather for Jen Craig made for a positive lambing.



Martyn Fletcher has weighed his Romney ewes and lambs.

## Martyn Fletcher

NSA South East Region committee and English committee member, Wiltshire



We've been extremely busy since we finishing lambing 2,900 Romney ewes outside in early May. We are pleased with our lamb survival rate of 92%, which would have been even better had we not had a couple of days of stormy weather.

Lambs were vaccinated against clostridial disease at between four and six weeks old and also given a B12 injection, because we know we have an issue with cobalt deficiency on our unit. Figures from 2019 show that this vitamin dose was money well spent – lambs were 3.6kgLW heavier at slaughter.

Red clover is also proving to be a wise investment and now plays a key role in our grazing system. We were growing hybrid kale to help finish lambs, as grass growth slowed later in the season. But, with dry springs and a flea beetle issue, growing a summer forage crop has become a challenge.

So red clover has been introduced to our system and we've just sown an additional 32 acres of chicory and red clover. The chicory will be ready just in time for the newly weaned lambs – it's about a foot high now. We'll have to manage the first grazing carefully, to avoid damaging the young clover plants. We've also dipped our flock for scab in June. We didn't see any clinical signs, but we had a suspicion that a contractor brought it onto the unit in the autumn. We discussed this with our vet and carried out blood tests on the flock and discovered that we did, indeed, have an infection.

But we had to postpone dipping because as treating pregnant ewes and young lambs is a 'no go'. That said, even when we did finally dip the flock, nine weeks after lambing, there were still no clinical signs or itchy sheep. It just goes to show that scab can be there, even if you can't see it.

We've just weighed 1,500 Romney ewes and lambs and we're collating the data, via Signet. We joined the scheme this year, which we're excited about. We hope it will help with our breed development.



Bryan Griffiths managed to get most lambs away quickly.

## Bryan Griffiths

NSA Chairman, Devon



Many years ago we were told that lamb is best baked twice – once in the field and once in the kitchen. This spring certainly proved the point. For two months lambs born in late February scurried between shade, water and creep feeders, while their mothers grazed on little more than dust. Yet by early July all but 16 had gone to slaughter, averaging 19.5kg.

We often question the costs associated with this flock, but with just one drench for nematodirus, no fly treatment and a means of getting lambs away quickly, the system has proved its worth this year. The tail-enders include five with 'knobby knees', the result of joint ill problems in the wet weather immediately post lambing. Interestingly the larger flock of Mules, which lambed through the same sheds and pens and turned out in sunshine, suffered no such issues. Such are the vagaries of joint ill. We allowed 50 hogs to rear their twin lambs with supplementary feeding and creep. Lambs were quite happy to share the troughs with their mothers, but as the lambs grew it became increasingly difficult to prevent the ewes from accessing the creep feeders. We reared more than 100 tame lambs from the mule flock on our wonderful, automatic feeder. They grew well on milk and the best 80% weaned with little check. The smallest and youngest always seem to struggle, particularly with lung issues. They are now all outside on ad-lib creep and, along with the hog's doubles, have been given two doses of clostridial/Pasteurella vaccine. We cleared three fields for silage in June and produced some quality fodder but only a modest six bales to the acre. We could have waited for more quantity, but we felt it was time to focus on freeing up fields for weaned lambs.

## Dan Phipps

NSA Eastern Region Chairman, Suffolk



I feel fortunate that, on paper, this year will appear to be, financially, quite normal and certainly in line with previous years. But the reality is nothing resembling normal. Lambing itself was without incident and we have now sold 2,240 lambs and have 1,000 lambs left grazing.

It seems a distant memory now, but shortly after scanning (November 2019) we had an outbreak of Keratoconjunctivitis (pink eye). We've seen outbreaks before in store lambs and as we moved lambs on to better pastures their fitness would improve and the issue would disappear. So this was a different challenge, having 2,000 ewes divided into 25 different groups split according to lambs carried and raddle marks.

These group sizes are usually ideal for running the stud paddocks. But moving flocks containing blind ewes from paddock to paddock took on a different meaning and required military organisation. Thoroughbred racehorses and sheep do not make good bedfellows and a thoroughbred racehorse is more valuable than a breeding ewe. My shepherds Andy and Tom's determination, and a sizeable expenditure on antibiotics, soon saw the issue largely resolved prior to lambing in mid-January. This was a blessing as we had envisaged a shed full of blind ewes blundering around.

Our outbreak of pink eye served as a reminder that the health of our flock is key to its prosperity. Covid-19 has served as a reminder to humanity that a threat to health is a threat to everyone's prosperity.

With Brexit looming I am optimistic that, with pressure and reminders from NSA of the importance of the export trade, the Government will do all it can to see that it is not the next threat to the prosperity of our flock.

Thomas Carrick is looking forward to a busy sale season.



## Thomas Carrick

NSA Northern Region Chairman, Cumbria



July always seems to fly by and this year is no exception. We're flat out baling when we can and shearing in between.

We have one full day of shearing left and I can't remember sheep as good to clip – even among leaner ewes there is plenty of rise in the fleece. Lambs have also done well, but until lately have never had much grass in front of them. I suppose the key is to keep it coming to them.

Crop wise we've been nervous about having plenty this year, as things have looked so bare all spring – even through the start of June when things are usually looking great. However, most fields have caught up now with good growth through July. One exception is our lower ground, which was extremely dry earlier in spring. It just hasn't rebounded yet, but will get a little fertiliser to encourage things shortly.

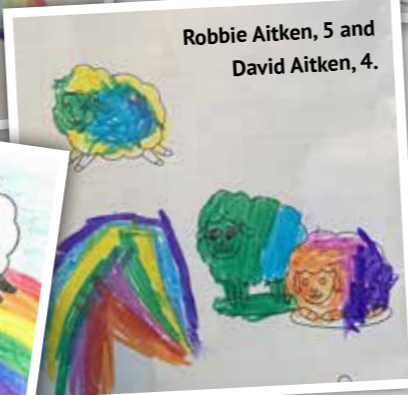
Looking forward, I'm hoping the Thame sheep fair is a success because we in the north use it as a barometer for breeding stock sales. A healthy trade there would put a bit of confidence into both buyers and sellers. We could all do with something to look forward to and decent trading conditions going into the back end of the year would do nicely after so much uncertainty.



# There are sheep at the end of the rainbow

NSA has enjoyed viewing the efforts our youngest readers who have sent in their coloured-in sheep from the June/July issue of Sheep Farmer magazine.

Here are some of our favourites. Thank you to all the enthusiastic mini shepherds (and their parents) who sent them in. Alongside British Wool, NSA also produced some worksheets to help keep children occupied as most have been at home during the Covid-19 pandemic.



## NSA social media update

NSA has stepped up activity on its social media platforms – Twitter and Facebook – during the past few months. This has led to plenty of new 'followers' who are able to receive almost daily updates on NSA activity. This includes policy updates, as well as more light-hearted competitions and fun posts.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James, who manages the NSA social media accounts, says: "It can be difficult to keep NSA's social media posts interesting and engaging and, although we recognise our Facebook and Twitter pages are an important platform where we can share industry news and updates, the 'fun' posts are always the ones that receive the most positive feedback. With this in mind, and with so much serious and worrying news related to Covid-19 filling our social media feeds during the past few months, NSA has made a concerted effort to run competitions and invite followers to share heart-warming images to create a positive thread for our followers to enjoy at this time." Recently NSA ran a week long campaign focusing on the benefits of wool, following the poor prices UK sheep farmers are receiving for fleeces. NSA was delighted to have several innovative companies using British wool donate their products as prizes for competitions, such as woollen dog leads and fleece laundry balls. The most popular post that NSA has added to its Facebook page in recent months invited people to share photos of their sheepdogs, in recognition of their important role on farm. Thank you to all of those that contributed towards this post.

If you do not yet follow NSA on social media, be sure to like or follow us @natsheep on Facebook and Twitter.





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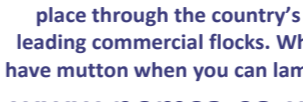
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