

# SHEEP FARMER

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2020

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



## VIRTUAL EVENTS

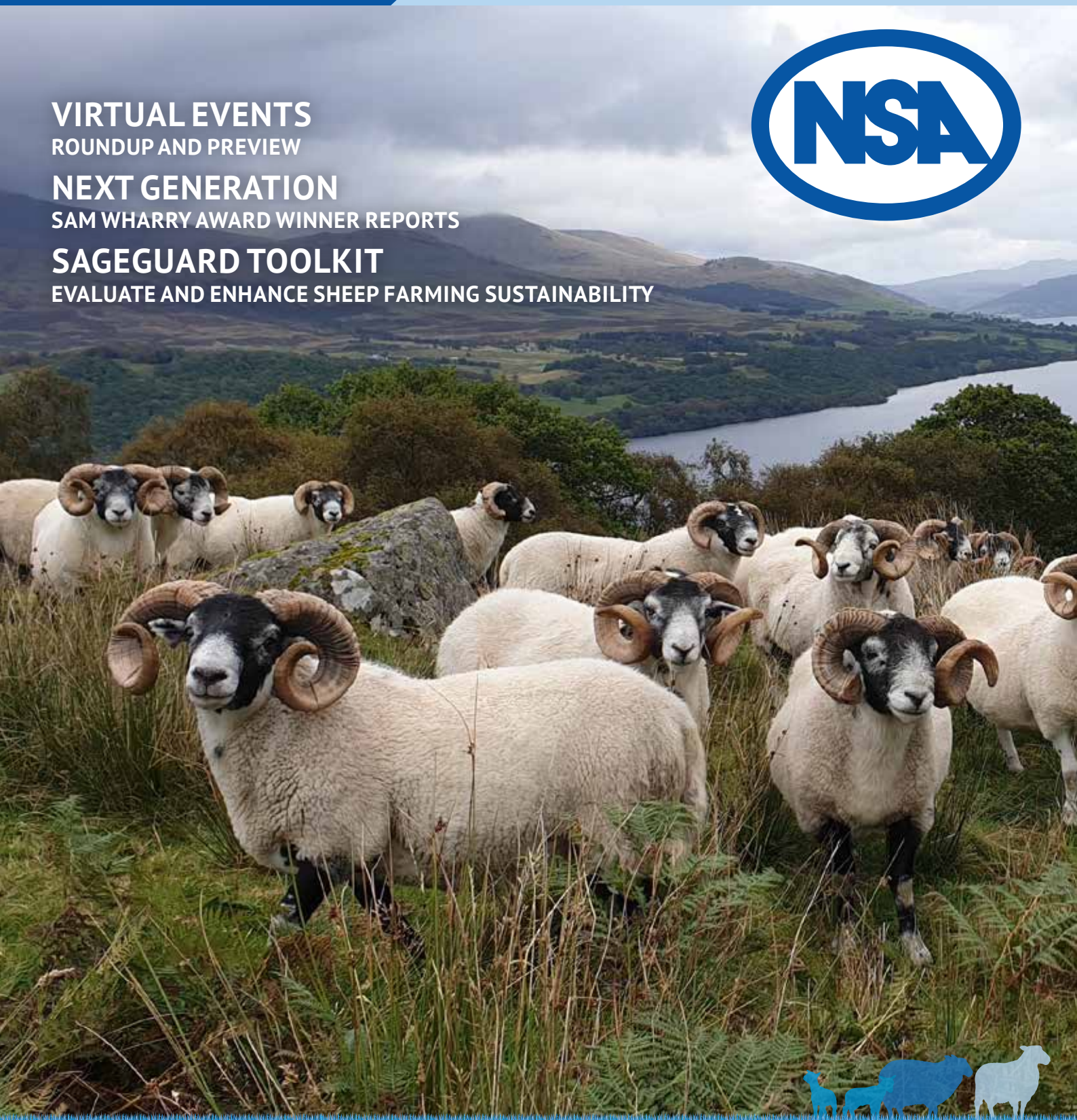
ROUNDUP AND PREVIEW

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HIPRA UK&IRELAND  
Foxhall Lodge, Foxhall Road, NG7 6LH, Nottingham, United Kingdom  
Tel.: (+44) 0115 845 6486 - ukandireland@hipra.com - www.hipra.com

# Much to be proud of and plenty still to do

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

At the time of writing there are some 100 days before we finally leave the EU and there is still no indication of a deal that will allow free access to a market, which takes between 35% and 40% of our product.

And we are about to embark on a new policy and regulatory framework for farming food and the environment, where we know the general direction but none of the detail.

Despite the uncertainty, we have experienced some cracking market prices for lambs and breeding stock. This shows that our marketplace can work for us – even if it can't always be relied on.

British sheep farming has much to be proud of. We are nowhere near a place where we can be complacent and there are vast improvements that we can and must make. More of that to come, but recognising what we are and being proud is, I believe, vital to a successful future.

One area of pride should be the resistance (often criticised), to losing the independent and highly diverse nature of what we do. For a long time, throughout an era where producing ever cheaper homogenous global commodities was said to be the future, our sheep industry retained its tens of thousands of family farms, with small flocks providing a business footing for many new entrants, right through to the bigger 'estate scale' sheep flocks.

### Diversity

We retained much of our rich breed diversity while improving the quality of our genetics. We stayed land based, producing food within environmental and ecological boundaries. We made significant sheep health and welfare gains, although I would strongly argue that we can go much further in this area. It's probably the number-one way that we can make further productivity gains in the future.

We are still the third largest exporter of sheepmeat in the world and sell some 60% of production into our domestic market. It can be and is argued that sheep farming swam against

a tide of industrialisation and homogenisation due to stubbornness and support payments. But, whatever the reason, we tick many of today's boxes in relation to what the public and policy makers now want. In the uplands and the lowlands we are multi-functional, with good environmental, animal welfare and people credentials.

We should never shy away from accepting that there are improvements that we can make and it's good to show that we are aware of this and working hard to make progress. If you, like me, believe that many of the positive things that come from sheep farming could be better understood and accepted then you'll probably agree that we need to do more to evidence, explain and convince people and policy makers. We need to step up our engagement and communication to the outside world – even more than we have to date.

While sheep farming is inherently good for landscapes, wildlife habitats, and the wider environment there is always more we can do and, in doing so, we can improve our standing with the public.

### Opportunities

We can and need to do more to protect and build our marketplace, and Brexit still presents a major hiccup. But export and domestic markets offer opportunities for us to do better and we can do this both at scale, in our volume markets, and at a more artisan level to build on the success that many direct sellers and local supply chains have seen throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Then there is sheep health and nutrition. You only need to look at the quality of our sheep flocks to see the improvements that have been made during the past few decades. But it is sobering to look at the VIDA surveillance because the big issues are diseases and parasites – worms, fluke, clostridial disease and abortion – that we have answers to.

All have management solutions, and vaccination and test-and-treat options. This is one of the main ways to make productivity gains without having to touch the highly diverse and traditional nature of our industry on which our pride, reputation, and image are based.



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#### NSA NEWS

- 04 NSA Ram Sales reports
- 07 NSA virtual events
- 10 NSA webinar roundup
- 12 Love Lamb Week

#### REGULAR FEATURES

- 13 NSA Policy
- 17 NSA Next Generation
- 20 Farm Feature: Edward Adamson
- 22 Business information
- 26 Marketing
- 30 Technical information
- 40 Following the flock

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

- 24 Sagesguard toolkit



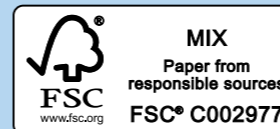
04 Ram sales success



07 NSA virtual events



20 Farm Feature



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# National Sheep Association

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

 /natsheep  @natsheep



## NSA officeholders

-  **Lord Inglewood**  
Honorary President
-  **Bryan Griffiths**  
Chair of the Board
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Honorary Treasurer  
Finance & General Purposes Chairman
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UK Policy & Technical Chairman
-  **Kevin Harrison**  
English Committee Chairman

### Central



Chairman: **David Howlett**



Secretary: **Rose Smyth**  
07807 359871

central@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Cymru / Wales



Chairman: **Kate Hovers**



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

### Eastern



Chairman: **Dan Phipps**



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

### Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**



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

### Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**



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

### Northern Ireland



Chairman: **Jonny Farmer**



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

### Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**



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

### South East



Chairman: **Yan Le Du**



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

### South West



Chairman: **Howard Tratt**



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

### NSA Rams Sales



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



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



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

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Safe delivery: lambing list is now open.

## Second stage of Covid-19 scheme now open

Millions of self-employed people whose livelihoods have been affected by Covid-19 are now able to claim a second payment of up to £6,570.

Those eligible will now be able to receive a second and final grant, worth 70% of their average monthly trading profits, with the money set to land in their bank accounts within six working days of making a claim. Anyone whose self-employed business has been adversely affected by Covid-19 since 14 July is eligible for the scheme. Applications for the second payment must be made before Monday 19th October, 2020. *Members can find more guidance on Covid-19 regulations, as well as information on accessing grants, at: www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work*

## Award recognises industry stalwart

The George Hedley Memorial Award, presented annually by the NSA to recognise the work of an individual who has 'gone the extra mile' for the sheep industry, has been won by John Geldard.

Former NSA chair, John is well known in the sheep sector and has been a stalwart supporter of NSA and the wider industry. "The award recognises the commitment, dedication and service given by John," says NSA Chair Bryan Griffiths. "John's vast experience and depth of knowledge, combined with his remarkable vision and foresight, continues to be invaluable to NSA and the wider beef and sheep sector. It gives me great pleasure to present this trophy to such a worthy recipient."



John Geldard (left) and Bryan Griffiths.

## NSA AGM an on-line success

NSA's AGM, held on 13th August, was the organisation's first ever on-line AGM and, despite some teething problems, the meeting ran smoothly.

The meeting was chaired by NSA President Lord Inglewood and all the existing office holders were re-elected. The Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2019 were adopted. As well as the formal element of the meeting there was discussion on the Agriculture Bill, with Lord Inglewood updating members on progress through the House of Lords. The future of Newton Rigg College was also discussed, with concerns voiced about the proposal to close the college in July 2021.

## NSA Marches Region ARMM date

Despite the uncertainty of whether the coming season of NSA Annual Regional Member's Meetings (ARMM) will see discussions held in person or virtually, NSA Marches Region has set a date for its upcoming event. Members residing in the region are invited to join the meeting on the evening of Wednesday 2nd December. Further details will be shared soon via the NSA Weekly Email Update and on the NSA website.

## Source lambing help for next season

NSA's Lambing List is now open once again for members to advertise for lambing help during the 2020/2021 season.

The list, which has grown in strength during recent years, also allows members to share details of any available work experience placements they can offer to agricultural and veterinary students. Members wishing to advertise on the list can submit their details online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or by contacting NSA Head Office. As, at this time, NSA is unsure of any restrictions on this service due to ongoing Covid-19 guidelines, members are encouraged to read the Lambing List recommendations for farmers via the website link.

## Staff changes

NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps has taken a step back from her role with the NSA to embark on a new career in teaching.

Ellie was a tremendous asset to the NSA and her passion for policy and input into Sheep Farmer magazine was invaluable. Ellie still continues to be part of the team, on a freelance basis, keeping abreast of policy updates from the Government and feeding information back to Head Office. We wish her all the best on her new adventure.



Ellie Phipps.

NSA also advertised for applicants for two roles: a full-time Digital Communications Officer and a freelance Senior Policy Consultant. As we go to print, these are currently in the interview stage. So keep an eye on our website and social media pages for the successful appointments.

NSA Operations Director Joanne Briggs returned from maternity leave in September, with Louise Hart, who covered her post, leaving NSA at end of September. Thanks go to Louise who has worked extremely hard in testing times that have been challenging for us all never mind being new to the NSA. Joanne has returned for three days a week, with Dave Gregory continuing with his current responsibility for events and the regions for one day a week until the new year.



Joanne Briggs.

# High entries and plenty of choice for buyers

Vendors and purchasers were pleased that the NSA South West ram sale could go ahead in what's been a difficult year.

As expected, numbers entered were up slightly on previous years and this resulted in plenty of choice for purchasers.

To help with social distancing the store cattle sale ring was used and first through the gate were the Charollais females. Quality sheep were in demand and the journey from Kettering for G.C. & C.J. Watson paid off with their shearling ewes making 500gns three times and John Harding selling a ewe lamb for 480gns.

There was a larger entry of shearling rams, compared to 2019, and the average of £502.85 was also up £2. EW Quick & Sons topped the averages at 645gns, with the top-price shearling ram making 720gns, with others at 700, 680, 650, 620 and 600gns. Gerald Burrough and Robert Hopper sold to 680gns, while Tom Newth made up to 600gns.

Charollais ram lambs were harder to sell, but Laura Monk sold to 450gns, a new young vendor Tom Nancekivell made 440gns, Denby Smith sold to 420gns, and Arthur Brown reached 400gns.

Auctioneer Russell Steer averaged £434 for females and £444 for males.

## Texels

Mark Davis then took the rostrum for the Texels. There was a lot of interest in the ewes with a shearling from E.W. Quick & Sons selling to 550gns with two at 500gns and another at 450gns. Graham Hill sold to 420gns. There was only one ewe lamb forward from Matthew Fear and she made 450gns.

There was a strong trade for the best rams and this was evident in that several of the top prices came went to vendors at the end of the sale. Once again it was the Quick family who had

top price of 1,050gns with others at 850gns and 800gns. Three rams sold for 950gns, the first of these from Robert and Rebecca Jordan. Phil and Lesley Martyn-Uglow sold two at this price with others at 900gns and 850gns, they also topped the Texel (and overall sale day) averages at £871. F.H. Chave & Son topped at 800gns and sold others to 750gns. The next best price, 780gns, went to Malcolm and Kim Coumbe, and Chris Ruby made 750gns.

## Suffolks

The MV Accredited Suffolks led the way in Ring One and Mike Waycott sold females to 340gns. A larger than usual entry of fantastic rams and a ring surrounded by eager purchasers must have been a dream come true for auctioneer Simon Alford. It was the first vendor of the day, Andrew and Wendy Reed, who secured the top price for the breed, and also the entire sale, at 1,200gns. They had others to 880, 850 and 800gns. Selling Suffolks for the first time at the sale was the Quick family and their best sold to 1,050gns with others making 880, 850, 800 and 780gns. Richard and David Rossiter make 650gns, as did Stephen Pierce who had another at 600gns.

Henry Derryman sold two for 620gns and Angus and Sue Howie and Mike Waycott reached 600gns. There were some strong ram lambs forward. New vendors R.B. & G.M. Morgan, from Usk, were rewarded with 500 and 480gns. Arthur Brown also made 500 and 400gns, while new vendor Darren Stephens sold two at 480gns.

The non-MV-accredited sheep then came through Ring One. This section is growing, year on year, with 66 entered. Malcolm and Kathy Yeo led the way with their Berrichons and made 600 and 500gns. Richard Turner sold a Bluefaced Leicester at 400gns and two more for 350gns. His Texel cross Bluefaced Leicesters made up to 400. A Suffolk shearling from James and Lucy Heard made 650gns and two from John Edwards made 400gns.

Ring Three saw various breeds of MV-accredited



Top price of the day, a Suffolk from Andrew and Wendy Reed at 1,200gns.

sheep, with Mark Davis in charge of the gavel. David Gwynne had travelled from Brecon that morning and was rewarded with 500gns and 480gns. Local vendor Frank King achieved 500gns followed by 440gns and twice at 400gns. Twose Farms, Carmarthenshire, had an excellent sale with its Lleys at 700gns, 620gns, and two at 480gns and 460gns. Blue Texels were a bit thin on the ground and topped at 380gns for a shearling ram from James and Belinda Kimber, with a ram lamb making 300gns for Matt and Vicky Smith.

Robert and Sophie Whitcombe sold two Border Leicesters for 350gns and another two for 300gns, a price equalled by Jim Pile, again for two. To finish a busy day at the sale, the Quick family went on to sell Chartex rams for 720, 700 and 580gns. Charollais cross Suffolk from Robert Hopper made 480gns, Charollais cross Beltex from VJ & ML Roots made 460 & 440gns, and the Rossiters sold a Suffolk cross for 450gns.

Russell took on selling in this ring for the Beltex. Females were in demand and had a top of 600gns for John and Gill Howieson for an aged ewe. Shearling ewes sold well to 520 and 500gns for the Howiesons. V.J. & M.L. Roots made 480 and 420gns, a price also achieved by Lorna Gregory. James and Belinda Kimber topped the shearling ram trade at 950gns, and Adrian Dufosse sold at 600, 580, 550 and 500gns.

Louise Elworthy sold at 600, 520 and 500gns, with Lorna Gregory at 550 and 500gns and Tracey Cobbledick also sold at 500gns. To bring the sale to a close were some Hampshire Down shearlings that topped for Jon Barnard at 380gns, who also had 360gns. A price equalled by Henry Derryman and family, who had two others at 350gns.

"We were pleased to welcome new vendors and purchasers and hope to see them all back in 2021," says NSA South West sale chairman Robert Jordan. "A huge thank you must go to all vendors and purchasers for working with NSA and Kivells to ensure a successful sale."

# Flying trade at Melton Mowbray

Numbers sold, averages and top prices were all up at the 35th Annual Ram Sale organised by the NSA Eastern Region and hosted by Melton Mowbray Market on Friday 18th September, 2020.



Philip Weaver's top-price Texel ram.

Leading the way was an excellent pen of Texel shearling rams from Philip Weaver, based at Caunton, Newark. His leader sold for the day's top price of 1,200gns to Woodthorpe Hall. And his eight tups finished the day on an average of £1,057.50. Barbara Smith, from Towcester, also had a four-figure sum for a Texel shearling tup from her pen, which sold for 1,090gns to B. M. F. Smith. A total of 55 Texel rams sold to average £578.48. Leading the Charollais section was Chris Timm from North Yorkshire. He had a strong pen of eight shearlings, finishing on an average of £874.12 to a top of 970gns. But it was his Charollais cross Beltex shearling ram that saw the best price in this section, selling for 1,080gns to Godolphin Management. The top-price ram lamb was a well-grown December-born lamb from Mitchel Britten and Elizabeth Barber's Norfolk-based Cavick Charollais flock. This one sold for 680gns to J. W. & J. Vickers. A total of 53 Charollais tups sold to average £524.80. The Suffolk section did not enjoy such strong trade as the other terminal sires. John Key, from Sheffield, had the best group of shearlings and was twice rewarded with 600gns. The average price for all tups sold was up £77 on 2019, finishing at £523. During the day a camera crew from BBC TV were filming for the programme The Farmers' Country Showdown. They had followed a couple of breeders prior to the sale, seeing how they selected and prepared their rams. It should make for good viewing.

# Show and ram sale success at Rugby

Rugby Farmers Mart welcomed back the NSA Eastern Region Sale for its 12th consecutive year on Friday 28th September.



Top price Texel shearling ram, from Mark Blakemore.

The catalogued entry of 171 rams was up on the previous year, with several pedigree and crossbred MV-accredited rams all presented for sale. The pre-sale show was judged by Mark Humphreys, from Buckingham, who carefully selected prize winners from several difficult classes and our thanks go to him. After much deliberation he finally settled on his champion pen of three shearling rams, Charles Sercombe's Charollais, from Melton Mowbray, which won the Heygates Perpetual Trophy. The sale started at 2pm, with style and shape high on the list of purchasers' priorities. Reporting a 73% clearance, the sale topped with a Texel shearling at 860gns from M. & L. Blakemore & Sons, from Bedford, with their pen of rams averaging £704.55. Average prices across all breeds were up on 2019 prices. Suffolks from Stockbridge's J. Key sold to 640, 635 and 630gns. Champion Charollais rams topped at 680gns from Charles Sercombe, finishing with an average of £672 for his pen of four. Yorkshire's Chris Timm also topped trade at 680gns for a Charollais shearling tup. Beltex cross Charollais from V.J. Roots topped the crossbred pens, selling to 680gns.

## PARASITE PROBLEMS?

**Control the Crypto:** We have produced a short animation outlining the management tools available to farmers to help control Cryptosporidium on farm: [bit.ly/moredun-animations](http://bit.ly/moredun-animations)

**Test, Don't Guess:** We have released a useful information booklet covering the subjects of roundworm, liver fluke and sheep scab, and illustrate how monitoring can be easily incorporated into your livestock system: [bit.ly/moredun-parasite-control](http://bit.ly/moredun-parasite-control)



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# NSA regional reports

## Cymru/Wales

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

**NSA Cymru/Wales Region met via Zoom in August. This was an upbeat meeting and another will be scheduled for November.**

We are just monitoring the situation to see if we are able to meet face-to-face, or if it will be via Zoom again. Trade has remained buoyant throughout the autumn, with good clearance of both ewes and rams. Plans are progressing for NSA Welsh Sheep 2021, which will be held in mid Wales on Tuesday 18th May, 2021. The hosts are Huw and Sioned Owen, and their son Dafydd. They run Red House Farm, Aberhafesp, which is just a five-minute drive from Newtown and easily accessible. We are grateful to welcome Hybu Cig Cymru as a major event sponsor, as well as Shearwell Data and Beltex Sheep Society as sponsors. Other mainline sponsorship opportunities are available, and more details of these and how to book a stand will be available on the website from Monday 2nd November, 2020.

For more details please contact Helen Roberts on 07976 803066 or email [helen@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:helen@nationalsheep.org.uk) <https://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/welshsheep/>.



## Marches

By Katie James, Secretary

**NSA Marches Region was able to continue with a long-awaited visit to Cotswold Seeds' new FarmEd visitor site on Wednesday 16th September.**

Advice was given that the visit could proceed as a business event but with limited numbers. It began with a talk from Cotswold Seeds' and FarmEd Director Ian Wilkinson, who gave an introduction to the farm site that the company acquired in 2014. It is now run as a demonstration farm with a mixture of arable, wildflower meadows, orchards and herbal leys. These are mob grazed by a small flock of sheep, owned by a local young farmer who they are happy to encourage as a new entrant to sheep farming. The sheep are managed carefully to enhance the return of nutrients to the soil, while allowing different grass and herbal ley mixes to be trialled on farm for Cotswold Seeds' business. Making the most of September's early evening sunshine, the visit was enjoyed by an extremely engaged group of members who viewed the grazing plots with interest and were grateful for a farm tour to be permitted once again.

## Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

**As you read this you may well have seen a short video clip that NSA Northern Ireland Region made in conjunction with vet Paul Crawford.**

He is the immediate past President of the Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland and in his presidential year, took up the fight against scab. The clip, which was made to be shared on social media, focuses on six questions: what is scab and where does it come from; what signs might I see and how can I be sure it is scab; and what are the treatment options; and how can I avoid getting scab in my flock? These were all answered with short statements, but enough to get farmers thinking about the problem. This initiative came about due to the pressure put on local government funds and we felt need to highlight this ever-growing problem. We are looking at farms with a view to holding our 2021 NSA Sheep Event on a farm, rather than in our usual mart venue, with several possibilities identified.

## Scotland

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

**NSA Scotsheep 2020, which should have been held in early June but was postponed due to Covid-19, will be held on Thursday 27th May, 2021, by kind permission of Robert and Hazel McNee, at Over Finlurg Farm in Tealing, Dundee.**

Plans for the event were well advanced prior to postponement and all the attractions will feature at next year's event, including the 166 commercial, educational and breed society exhibitors and sponsors, who kindly deferred their booking until the new date. Those exhibitors that had not booked prior to the closing date this year will have the opportunity to do so, as of Monday 2nd November, 2020. Further information is available from our website: [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-scotland/scotsheep/](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-scotland/scotsheep/).

## Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

**NSA Northern Region is looking to hold NSA North Sheep 2021 at Bradford House Farm, in Belsay near Ponteland, Northumberland, on Wednesday 2nd June, 2021.**

It is being kindly hosted by William Woodman and family. Enquiries are being taken for sponsorship. Stand bookings will open online in the autumn. NSA Northern Region continues to meet periodically, via Zoom, until restrictions change to allow for face-to-face meetings. The website for North Sheep 2021 is [up and running, so visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/northsheep](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/northsheep) to find out more.

## South West

By Ian May, Manager

**While our Autumn events have, unfortunately, been put on hold this year, preparations are gathering pace for what we hope will be a great NSA Sheep South West Event, on Tuesday 22nd June, 2021, at Rampisham Manor Farm, in Rampisham near Dorchester, Dorset, by kind permission of Robert Boileau.**

Stand bookings will be open on NSA's website from Monday 2nd November. In the meantime, if anyone has any queries or would be interested in any of our various sponsorship packages please contact event organiser Sue Martyn, via email at [suem@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:suem@nationalsheep.org.uk), or phone to 07967 512660.

Eilidh Garrett's winning photograph of jumping Ryeland lambs.



## Members embrace virtual online event

**NSA has held the first of a series of virtual activities to celebrate the sheep industry, with the first virtual 'event' welcoming farmers to an online platform that was packed with competitions, webinars and exhibitors' stands.**

More than 250 people took part in the online competitions, which included carcass grading. This was kindly sponsored by Mutchmeats, established in 1981 by the Mutch family. The Cotswolds-based company has grown from humble beginnings into a multi-species abattoir, processing beef and lamb. The area is surrounded by some superb farms and it procures some of its stock from these local producers. Winning the top prize in the carcass grading was Sara Wakefield, from Frodsham in Cheshire, with Sara Sharpe, from Cleator Moor in Cumbria, taking reserve.

Derbyshire's Lucy Taylor won the Facebook competition, which invited NSA followers to register for the event and share with friends on social media to help promote the virtual event. Lucy is now looking forward to receiving her prize – feed buckets from Rumenco for her flock of Pedigree Dorset and Poll Dorset sheep.

The Nettex Agri Topping Pack, a prize offered to new members signing up to join NSA during the two-day duration of the virtual event in August, was won by Neil Forrest, from Huntly in Scotland.

Meanwhile the Scottish Blackface stand took top spot in the virtual event's breed stand competition.

In the photograph competitions, there was a fantastic array of images sent through, from across the UK. Eilidh Garrett, from Aberdeenshire, took top spot in the under 16s category, with her jumping Ryeland lambs (see above) while Donna MacKenzie, from Perthshire, won the adult photography competition (pictured on the cover). Eilidh wins a year's NSA under 27 membership and Donna received a £100 voucher to spend at Cumbria's Plumgarths Farm Shop, kindly donated by NSA Vice President John Geldard.

Also scooping up a prize, taking second in the adults competition was Ruth Tarn, from County Durham. Ruth wins a lovely mounted print, kindly donated by sheep loving artist Lucy Pittaway.

## Webinars

Elsewhere the event ran six webinars covering a wide range of topics from abortion and quarantine tips, through to understanding performance figures.

"The event featured six fantastic webinars and workshops, which delivered a diverse range of subjects around the topic of breeding the best," says NSA Operations Support Manager Louise Hart, who ran the webinars.

"We saw plenty of engagement from the attendees with thought-provoking question-and-answer sessions after the presentations. A big thank you to all our speakers and sponsors for enabling this knowledge transfer to take place. It was great to see international attendees and this shows how webinars enable us to connect to a wide audience across not only valleys but also oceans."

# NSA webinar events take-home tips

NSA's virtual event ran six webinars, covering topics ranging from abortion and quarantine through to understanding performance figures. For those who missed the event, or have yet to catch up via [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars), here are the key take-home points from each webinar.

## ► Achieving optimal performance in your flock

**Presented by NSA's Dan Phipps, AHDB's Ed Brant and HCC's John Richards**

- Abattoir-derived EBVs have been developed using growth and kill data from these lambs to provide new traits with commercial economic importance.
- RamCompare aims to develop and strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the relationships between the EBVs in order to motivate their uptake and use within the sheep industry.
- RamCompare helps producers to focus their buying choices and identify rams with the potential for improved performance, using key EBVs or terminal sire index to achieve an increased carcass value of £4 or faster finishing lambs (2-3 weeks).
- Understand your objectives and the markets you are producing for.
- Select the best rams from within a breed.
- Genetics make a massive difference to your commercial lamb performance and performance recorded rams do make an impact on lamb output and performance.
- EBVs are an additional source of information when choosing a ram.
- Be open to new ideas and be prepared to change.
- Try to look at individual EBVs rather than just the index.

## ► Enzootic abortion – the risk and the costs

**Sponsored by CEVA**

**Presented by Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health**

**Just one abortion due to enzootic abortion (EAE) is a wasted cost of...**

- Getting the ewe in lamb.
- Supporting that pregnancy (feed and scanning).
- Cleaning up after abortion (labour, disinfectants).
- Vet/disease investigation.
- Carcass disposal.
- Veterinary costs to treat the ewe.
- Potential sale of lamb(s) or purchase of replacement(s).
- Cost of an outbreak**
- Multiply this by 30% of your lambing flock. This is how much EAE could cost you in an outbreak.
- Cost of ongoing low-level disease**
- Multiply this by 2% of your lambing flock. This is the minimum cost per year if you have circulating EAE.
- Multiply this annual figure by 3 or 4. This is how much EAE could cost you during the full period of vaccination.



Continued on page 8 ►

**YOUR NSA REGION:** To attend or enquire about an event in your region or raise a sheep farming issue you want discussed at a regional committee meeting, find your regional representative on page 2. Don't forget, devolved regions also dedicate time to policy work. Read about this on pages 13-15.

## The importance of quarantine: procedures for when you get your sheep home

Sponsored by MSD - Presented by NSA & SCOPS' Kevin Harrison, Moredun's Beth Wells, Elanco's Matt Colston



- Consider the price of poor quarantine versus the cost of good quarantine. Buying in disease is a costly, stressful, and time-consuming exercise.
- Hidden risks of buying sheep include 'iceberg' diseases, fluke, flukicide resistance, lameness, bluetongue, CLA, MV, anthelmintic resistance, and sheep scab.
- Familiarise yourself with the biosecurity 'big 5' – livestock movement, quarantine, hygiene, diagnostic tests and preventative vaccines, and health plans.
- Quarantine for all bought-in or returning livestock is vital.
- Use all available tools to avoid buying in disease and to keep disease out of your flock.
- Sheep scab: consider testing for sheep scab during quarantine, using the blood test, rather than treating, to conserve drug efficacy for both roundworms and scab. Take a look at the Moredun animations for more information: <https://www.moredun.org.uk/foundation/outreach/animation-series>
- OPA: if this is considered a risk, buy from trusted sources or flocks that are using transthoracic ultrasound scanning.
- To tackle worms and wormer resistance, farmers must: yard/house on arrival; weigh animals; calibrate dosing gun and give correct dose of wormers to remove resistant worms; hold off pasture for between 24 and 48 hours; turn out to recently used pasture; and, importantly, keep these sheep isolated from resident flock. To read more visit this website: [www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/worms/quarantine-treatments/](http://www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/worms/quarantine-treatments/).
- Liver fluke (and triclabendazole resistance): test to confirm presence of liver fluke. No product will remove all fluke present with a single treatment. Administer a first treatment (closantel) on arrival. Recently grazed turnout fields must be free from mud snail habitat and sheep must be isolated until the second closantel treatment, six weeks later. They must remain on land without mud snail habitat.
- Lameness (footrot, CODD): isolation (between three and four weeks); ensure all feet on all animals are 100% before allowing bought-in animals to mix with resident flock; apply the five-point plan.

## Sheep lameness workshop

Sponsored by MSD - Presented by Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health



- Lameness is painful and carries considerable costs to the flock – in terms of welfare, vet and medicines costs.
- It is appropriate to use injectable antibiotics to treat sheep lame with foot rot or CODD, but the primary aim should be to prevent lameness.
- Key is to plan ahead, prevent the spread of disease and protect the flock.
- Farmers should plan ahead by working with their vet to make a correct diagnosis, to develop a farm-specific assessment of risk factors and appropriate control measures.
- The five-point plan is proven and effective, but should be considered as a whole package. Farmers should not 'pick and choose'.
- Prevent the build-up of a lameness challenge by avoiding the spread of infection, isolating and rapidly treating clinical cases, culling persistent offenders, and quarantining all incoming sheep.
- Protect the flock by breeding for greater resilience to lameness and considering flock vaccination as a long-term preventative measure.
- There is a cost-benefit to vaccination if flock lameness levels are more than 2%, but do not consider vaccination without committing to the whole five-point plan.
- It is possible to control lameness and consistently reduce the incidence to extremely low levels, so farmers should be encouraged.

## A buyers' and sellers' guide to health status, treatment programmes and declarations.

Sponsored by MSD - Presented by NSA's Charles Sercombe, SRUC's Alison Braddock, and MSD's Hannah Donegan



- Diseases are everywhere but many are preventable, including abortion, lameness, orf and sheep scab.
- Don't buy in disease. Animals may look OK, but can still spread infection.
- Adding animals to your flock is a major disease risk, so do your homework and buy from a trusted source with proven traceable health status.
- Proactive health planning with your vet is key and if you do not operate a closed flock, pre-plan purchasing including isolation, testing and treatment.
- Demand high health status from sellers. They may not always volunteer information unless you ask the right questions. So don't make assumptions.
- Why strive for high health status and vaccination policy? Protect investment, improve welfare, win buyer confidence, improve sustainability and improve profits.
- Buying high health status animals is a wasted investment if they won't reach their potential because infectious disease is circulating in your flock, so carry out screening.
- Vaccinations prevent and control infectious diseases, reduce the need for antibiotic and other treatments, and can optimise health and welfare.
- MSD is launching Producer Declaration Forms that aim to add transparency, and list vaccines that have been administered to provide protection against disease, at the point of sale.
- Check out the Premium Sheep and Goat Health Schemes register of members at [www.psghs.co.uk](http://www.psghs.co.uk) to source high health status replacements. Not all members are listed so contact the office on 01835 822456 if you need to check membership.

## Rams, understanding the genetics you're working with, and MOTs

Sponsored by AHDB - Presented by AHDB's Emma Steele, Llyen Society's Kate Phillips, and XL Vets



- Give yourself plenty of time. Start thinking about ram MOTs two months before mating.
- If in doubt consult your vet – a semen test is the gold standard for flock efficiency.
- Don't forget rams in the routine flock treatments.
- Carry out ram MOTs on teeth, body condition score, brisket, feet, prepuce (sheath), penis and testicles.
- A mature ram should be capable of getting 85% of 60 and a ram lamb 85% of 40 normal, healthy, cycling ewes in lamb in the first cycle.
- Use the link between EBVs and important commercial traits (days to slaughter, carcase weight and conformation) to select the best rams for your system.
- In any system, using EBVs allows the best rams for conformation and days to slaughter to be selected.
- Maternal EBVs are helpful in identifying superior animals for sustainable sheep production.
- FEC and IgA EBVs will help in fight against anthelmintic resistance.
- Review your performance regularly.
- The new Welsh Hill Sheep Breeding Index has been launched to help identify animals that thrive in the hill environment and optimise the efficiency and economic performance of hill sheep.



## FEEDING THE FLOCK AND GETTING IT RIGHT

[www.nsavirtualevent.org.uk](http://www.nsavirtualevent.org.uk)

20th and 21st October

## Second virtual event preview

It's disappointing that NSA is still unable to hold face-to-face sheep events but, until then, the second online phase of activities for the NSA's 2020 celebration of sheep farming is all set for later in October.

The practical part of an active two days of webinars and workshops will focus on health and nutrition – keeping ewes in good body condition, preparing them early to ensure good colostrum production, and finishing lambs.

### Challenge

Phil Stocker comments, "Sheep nutrition and health management is more important than ever this autumn, given the industry's highly tenuous situation with trade negotiations with the EU, and further afield. We will face a significant challenge in early 2021. And it's not just trade that is uncertain. What future Government support for farming and environmental management in England and all our devolved nations will look like going forward is still unclear".

Tune in on Tuesday 20th and Wednesday 21st October, where we will be 'Feeding the flock and getting it right' with a series of webinars, as detailed in the panel on the right. The online fleece competition results will be revealed and there will be plenty of trade and breed society stands to view. To login and register, and to find out more information, please go to: [www.nsavirtualevent.org.uk](http://www.nsavirtualevent.org.uk)



## Webinar timetable

### Tuesday 20th October

8.30am: Principles of feeding sheep. Sponsored by AHDB

Nerys Wright, AHDB

Nerys Wright will set the scene with a reminder about the principles of feeding breeding ewes, focussing on energy and protein requirements throughout the year and how to calculate them.

11.00am: Supplementing forage: how feeding blocks and buckets can provide an efficient return on investment. Sponsored by Rumenco

Dr Alison Bond PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons)

Feeding free access blocks and buckets can be a very effective and economical way to supplement and balance a grass or forage-based diet. With proven benefits for ewes, rams and lambs throughout all stages of the production cycle there has never been a better time to find out how free access supplements can help you get the most from your home-grown forage.

3.00pm: The importance of hitting the lamb market at the right time. Sponsored by For Farmers

James Hague, Marketing Technical Director at ForFarmers

How ewe nutrition impacts getting into lamb and finishing lambs quickly to hit the peak market.

7.30pm: Getting started with technology. Sponsored by AgriWebb

Josh Brock, AgriWebb & Ed Bray, Sheep Farmer

An interview with Ed Bray about how he is running and growing his business with technology, and the easy benefits he's reaping. And insight into how you can do the same and why now is the best time to adopt technology. There will also be a full demonstration of the AgriWebb farm management system. AgriWebb will also be offering attendees the chance to win prizes during the session.

### Wednesday 21st October

8.30am: The role of key trace elements in sheep health and fertility. Sponsored by Bimeda

Peter Bone, Independent Ruminant Mineral Nutritionist

Understanding the role that key trace elements play in sheep (and lamb) health and sheep fertility. The talk will explore the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of trace-element supplementation, as well as information on the correct technique for administering trace-element boluses.

11.00am: Flock benefits from trees: from improving FCE to mineral and worms. Sponsored by Woodland Trust

Dr Lindsay Whistance, Senior Livestock Researcher - Organic Research Centre, Dr Nigel Kendall, Nottingham Vets School & Sam Hollick, Bangor University

An overview of the health and behaviour benefits that trees can offer your flock. Plus an update on the willow trial and cobalt finishing lambs, and worm studies. And the Electric Sheep Project looks at shelter and to improve FCE.

1.00pm: Getting ewe colostrum right: how to ensure your lambs get the best start. Sponsored by MSD

Kat Baxter-Smith BVetMed CertAVP(EM) MRCVS, MSD Veterinary Advisor

Getting ewe colostrum right: how to ensure your lambs get the best start. Kat will discuss the importance of colostrum in the first days of the newborn lamb's life. She will also share a practical approach to colostrum management on farm, which will include using vaccination to ensure that lambs get the best possible start in life.

3.00pm: Interpretation of Forage Analyses and Feed Labelling. Sponsored by Carrs Billington

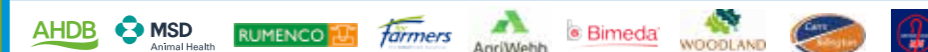
Paul Mardell, Technical Manager Carrs Billington and Chairman of BSDA & Dr Ruth Lawson, Ruminant Technical Manager, Carrs Billington

Forage analysis and how to interpret the results, followed by the interpretation of a sheep feed label.

7.30pm: Current wool market situation and British Wool's consumer focussed marketing strategy. Sponsored by British Wool

Graham Clark, Director of Marketing British Wool

An overview of the structure of the wool market in the UK and how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected wool prices. An update on the work British Wool has been doing to drive and increase UK consumer awareness about wool, and an opportunity to find out more about product development projects to increase demand.



# NSA webinar round up

Webinars offer tips to improve sheep health and flock management.

## Liver fluke: test, don't guess



The Moredun Foundation, Elanco, and NSA came together to deliver the second in a series of webinars on internal parasite control on Wednesday 6th August.

This webinar focussed on liver fluke and attracted close to 200 attendees. Led by Chair of SCOPS and NSA English Committee Chair Kevin Harrison, the overriding theme of this webinar was 'test, don't guess'. It made the case, similarly to the first webinar in the series on stomach worm control, that sheep farmers and vets need to be using testing techniques to understand the problems they're trying to overcome. And that testing is also vital to check on the efficacy of any treatments, particularly in light of growing anthelmintic resistance.

NSA CEO Phil Stocker was the first speaker and explained why managing parasites effectively contributes to improving productivity and profitability. After sharing an overview of the VIDA Veterinary Surveillance data on fluke related sheep deaths, Phil also explained why land management and environmental factors can help productivity, but also present additional challenges. Areas of wet 'habitat' land, for example, are also good habitats for the mud snail – the liver fluke's intermediate host.

## Forecasting

Moredun Institutes' Philip Skuce was the second speaker and explained the life cycle of liver fluke, listed the clinical signs, and went on to explain how NADIS' fluke forecasting index works.

Philip discussed the diagnostic options, as well as their respective strengths and weaknesses.

The third and final speaker was Elanco's Matt Colston who covered farm and field risk assessments, testing procedures, and treatments options.

"This short series of partnership-delivered webinars have been a great success and I'd like to thank everyone involved, particularly the people 'behind the scenes' who made everything run so smoothly and enjoyably," says Phil Stocker. "The number of attendees and comment from viewers suggest that these webinars were just what the doctor, or maybe in this case the sheep farmer, ordered."

To watch a recording of the webinar, go to:

[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports/29504/nsa-elanco-and-moredun-webinar-2-sustainable-parasite-control-test-don-t-guess/](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports/29504/nsa-elanco-and-moredun-webinar-2-sustainable-parasite-control-test-don-t-guess/)

## Greater focus on grassland management



Grassland management was the webinar topic that kept viewers engaged on Wednesday 5th August.

GrassCheckGB's agronomist Liz Genever spoke to Rhys Edwards, a sheep farmer from near Bridgend in South Wales, and Aled Evans, a beef and sheep farmer from near Carmarthen in North Wales, about their experiences on improving production from grass and their involvement with GrassCheckGB.

Rhys and his father Russell started measuring grass at their farm when they were accepted onto GrassCheckGB, but they had begun rotationally grazing the year before. They are focussing on ewe efficiency per hectare and rotational grazing is helping them to keep high quality grass in front of the ewe and lambs.

## Rainfall

The farm struggled with the high rainfall in early 2020, followed by dry conditions during the spring, and lamb performance has suffered as a result. They are drawing up a winter feed budget this year to help them get off to a better start in spring, with more grass carried through the winter by housing ewes to removed stock from the grass. They are also involved in RamCompare and HCC's Stockplus, and are a Farming Connect demonstration farm.

Aled has been measuring grass and rotational grazing for a few years but GrassCheckGB, alongside activity through Farming Connect's Prosper from Pasture with Precision Grazing, has focussed his mind.

His aim is to reduce the cost of production, by using the figures to save on nitrogen and bought-in feed. None of his sheep are housed and he uses brassica crops to ensure adequate grass reserves for lambing. He's also developed a winter feed budget.

Aled focuses on monitoring average farm covers, which help him to see the impact of activity now on what may happen next year, and grazing days ahead. This also helps with short-term decisions on buying in store lambs or selling cattle.

To watch a recording of the webinar, go to:

[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports/29718/nsa-and-grasscheck-gb-live-chat-with-farmers-rhys-edwards-and-aled-evans/](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports/29718/nsa-and-grasscheck-gb-live-chat-with-farmers-rhys-edwards-and-aled-evans/)

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# Love Lamb Week pays tribute to founder

The sixth annual Love Lamb Week took place at the beginning of September, once again attracting recognition from famous farming and culinary faces.

The week-long campaign, which encourages consumers to eat more lamb, this year focused on promoting its sustainable production methods to gain backing for the industry.

The success of Love Lamb Week 2020, however, was tainted by the sad news of the untimely passing of the campaign's founder, popular Cumbria-based sheep farmer Rachel Lumley, who died suddenly in July.

Rachel began the campaign back in 2015. Reacting to falling lamb consumption and depressed lamb prices, she recognised that a strategically planned promotion campaign was needed to encourage people to put

British lamb back on their dinner plates. Since then the campaign has grown year on year and it now has a firm place on the sheep farming calendar.

"Rachel was the driving force behind the campaign, wanting British lamb to get the attention it deserves and to highlight the importance of local and independent supply chains," says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. "Through her leadership, as well as solid external support, Love Lamb Week has caught the attention of top chefs from across the world, as well as national press and broadcast media.

## Legacy

"Rachel did a fantastic job in developing the campaign and the level of notability it has today. All at NSA are proud to support and continue to build on the fantastic legacy Rachel started."

As well as Love Lamb Week, Rachel was

LOVE  
LAMB  
WEEK



Rachel Lumley.

known as a former Secretary of the English Shearing Circuit and well-known wool handler, representing England at the World Shearing and Woolhandling Championships in 2017.

NSA Next Generation Ambassador Marie Prebble competed alongside Rachel in the competition. "Rachel was one of a kind – a real gem. Her bubbly personality made her well-known in the farming and shearing community and she is very much missed," she says. "Rachel represented England on the woolhandling team in New Zealand and Ireland, and her charismatic and kind nature made her many friends on her travels. She was a passionate advocate for British farming and a brilliant role model. Our thoughts will stay with her partner John Errington, and their young daughter Francesca, as well as with Rachel's sister and parents."



# Brexit looms and market access must be secured

Sheep exports still face an uncertain future.

We have, at the time of writing and as I stated earlier in this issue, some 100 days before the Brexit transition period finished and we finally leave the EU.

We have no idea what the outcome will be but we do know that losing access to the EU market, or being faced with tariffs of some 46%, would have a serious effect on our markets and prices.

The situation we are faced with is a deal and tariff-free access, or no deal and access at WTO rules, which is where the tariffs come in. In both scenarios we still have access to the EU market and let's remember that the EU takes between 35% and 40% of our total annual sheepmeat production.

But there is still a risk that we will lose access entirely for a period of time and the effect of this could be serious. We still have a list of practical things to complete before British lamb can be sent to the EU at all. These include: official third-country listing by the EU; agreeing a new meat stamp, as we won't be able to use 'UK' anymore; and reaching agreement that overcomes a need

for a single holding 40-day residency period for products being exported and, with this, overcoming the risk of our live markets and collection centres being holdings in their own right and breaking that residency period.

## Uncertainties

We also have uncertainties about border control points and whether refrigerated lorries carrying perishable food products can be given priority to pass through. While the Government's answer – 'let's get it done' – might sound like a new slogan, it is, in truth, very aware of all these barriers. The EU isn't being as helpful as we would like, although expecting them to be helpful would be naïve given the nature of the discussions..

One of the Government's strategies to help overcome any difficulties with continued access to the EU market is to develop new free trade agreements with non-EU countries. But we have always known that this takes time and would be inadequate to replace the volumes going to the EU within the timescales needed.

While we have been working with the United Arab Emirates for some time, the areas of immediate focus are Japan, the US, New Zealand,

and Australia. Progress to date is showing that getting these deals across the line in a satisfactory way is not at all easy.

A free-trade deal with Japan has now been signed off and, interestingly, agriculture and food was recognised by the Japanese government as being the most sensitive of products with care taken not to damage domestic production. The Japanese government hasn't increased its current EU TRQs overall, so the UK can only make use of unfulfilled TRQ volumes.

The US discussions are progressing but slowly and the Presidential elections could well slow things down further. The American sheep industry currently has some serious structural problems and, understandably, it is making a lot of noise about the need to be protected.

The industry is not welcoming the prospect of British lamb hitting US shores. It goes without saying that free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand hold no sheepmeat export prospects for us whatsoever, even though it does make sense for our three nations to be working together on pre-competitive issues in the interests of the global sheep farming community.

## NSA's voice heard in trade negotiations

NSA has been invited onto the Department of International Trade's 'Trade Advisory Group', to advise and support impact assessments of trade deals and we will be working hard to ensure the voice of sheep farming is well heard.

With the market having been very strong throughout the summer and into early autumn, it is important to remember that the Brexit situation at the end of the year, and changing trade patterns likely through new free trade

agreements, suggest things could potentially be very uncertain in the short term until changes in trade patterns become settled.

If things do go badly, the NSA, working with other farming organisations, will be pushing to secure commitments from Westminster and our devolved nations that they will step in to support our industry in the event of market collapse.

We were in this situation this time in 2019, as we approached a potential 'no deal' at the

end of October, and advanced plans were drawn up to cushion us through a crisis situation.

Covid-19 will, undoubtedly, make the purse strings tighter at some stage, but we will be pushing for all our Governments to give similar support commitments to those recently given by Scottish Government. And we will continue to make the case that if they give these assurances now it will do a lot to protect confidence and possibly avoid falling prices in the first instance.

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Watchful eye: devolved nations look to see impact of scheme change on England's sheep sector.

## Support scheme changes – all eyes on England

In England changes to farm schemes are still planned for 2021, while in our devolved nations it looks likely that things will stay more or less as they are until 2024/5.

Wales has given this commitment, it has always been Scotland's intention, and Northern Ireland is very likely to follow suit.

To an extent there will be a lot of watching and learning from what happens in England, where we will start to see a reduction in the 2021 Basic Payment along with the launch of a national ELMS pilot, which is likely to involve several thousand farms before national roll out in 2024.

### Uncertainty

The simplified CSS will continue but for many, particularly those not involved in the ELMS pilot, this will still mean a reduction in income at a time of real uncertainty. Defra has recently been talking about a new interim 'Sustainable Farming Incentive', funded by BPS clawback which will aim to fill a gap for many not able to be part of ELMS through these early years. There are only scant details of this scheme, although there is a whisper of incentives to encourage and reward for good soil and water management.

Alongside ELMS, the Pathway programme is the scheme being developed by Defra in England to encourage better animal health and welfare. We are likely to see a small grants scheme in 2021, with the details of Pathway announced in 2021 but not to open for business until 2022.

The NSA has been working closely with the ELMS, Pathway and Productivity teams to advise, comment, and influence the detail of the schemes and will keep members informed.

Our work with Defra on ELMS, Pathway, and Productivity initiatives, and similar interactions with

devolved Governments, is less formal but not unlike our work with Defra and AHDB on 'co-creation' of the new Livestock Information Service, through Traceability Design Users Group (TDUG).

Co-creation is becoming more common. The Government would argue that the UK's membership of the EU has prevented this but, with the volume of work needing to be done and the importance of getting it as right as we can at the first attempt, I would argue that the only way is co-creation.

It does bring risks, but it's far better than staying quiet and then complaining when things go wrong. The development of the Livestock Information Service (LIS) has been delayed by Covid-19 restrictions and the big casualty is a delay in introducing bovine EID. Sheep are likely now to be the first species coming under the LIS, in early 2021, initially continuing to use ARAMS although through the LIS.

Most recently the industry group involved in TDUG has been exploring the added benefits and services that the service could provide, because it's crucial that these are being considered and worked towards from an early stage. There are also parallel discussions slowly taking place on livestock

movements, paperless reporting, and standstill policy and regulation.

### Priority

Many other policy topics affecting sheep farming are still 'live' between industry and Government, although most of these have been side-lined while the Agriculture Bill and future farm scheme design take priority. These include topics such as: mandatory price reporting and carcass classification; carcass splitting and sheep ageing; journey/transport times; the future of live exports; national programmes, to reduce the impact of sheep scab; the future role of advice on farms; tree planting policies; sheep worrying and rural crime; and, of course, various working groups with the devolved administrations.

The volume of policy work going on at present is phenomenal and the topics covered here are examples of some of our key work areas – and there are plenty more. It's become an increasingly important part of NSA's work because, whether we like it or not, it sets the framework and the 'rules' within which we operate. This is why we are increasing our resources that are focussed on this work area, so we can do even more to safeguard our industry.

 <p><b>Refer a friend or a neighbour to join NSA using the membership form online at <a href="http://nationalsheep.org.uk">nationalsheep.org.uk</a> for your chance to win a Ritchie portable sheep race worth over £1,000</b></p>	 <p><b>Sheep Farmer magazine: the best way to promote your services to the UK sheep sector. Advertising starts from £30 for NSA members. Speak to Helen Roberts. See page 2 for contact details.</b></p> <p><b>GEORGE MUDGE SHEARING</b> New and second hand mains and 12V machines Full range of spares All requisites for shearers NZ Super Crook for only £25 01822 615456 <a href="mailto:info@georgemudgeshearing.co.uk">info@georgemudgeshearing.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.georgemudgeshearing.co.uk">www.georgemudgeshearing.co.uk</a></p>	 <p><b>WHERE CROWS WOULD DIE</b> Livestock painter, Mary Griese's first novel is available from book shops, yloffa.com and Amazon at £8.99</p>
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## Welcome support at a much-needed time in Scotland

By Grace Reid, Regional Co-ordinator



Finding CAP payments in bank accounts, the earliest they've ever been since the loan scheme was established, the provision of much-needed support to withstand the unfurling of a post-Brexit and Covid-19 world has certainly been welcomed.

The nationwide Covid-19 lockdown has highlighted just how important the countryside is and why it needs to be protected using the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. There have been many issues raised in relation to public access during the year and NSA Scotland will be engaging with stakeholders to propose amendments going forward. If you have had any incidents or information to share, or suggestions that you wish to make, please get in touch.

Albeit Scotland has taken a different route to policy planning in the

future, in comparison to the rest of the UK, the dependency on Less Favoured Area Support payments must be reinforced into policy making post 2024.

The vital funding delivered to the differentiating landscapes our flock inhabits must not be given insignificance, particularly in the fight against climate change and plans for forestry.

### Engage

We will continue to engage and participate in regard to future plans to ensure that we are in the best possible position to receive and employ developments of future schemes and direction. While event planning continues to be disrupted for the latter half of 2020, optimism for 2021 must prevail. I urge all NSA Scotland members to stay safe and get involved with your NSA Scotland Regional Advisory Group to ensure that the voices of Scotland's sheep farmers can be heard on all levels.

## Call for Government to clarify and confirm new rules in Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Committee met with James Owen, the Deputy Director of Land Management Reform Division Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government, who talked us through the next steps within the Sustainable Land and Farming consultation, and the Welsh Government's (WG) plans for the future of agriculture and the rural economy to be delivered through a White Paper and introduction of an Agricultural (Wales) Bill in the next Senedd term.

Before WG consult on this there is a live consultation that is concerned with simplifying the current CAP regulations, where WG set out several small but impactful changes to the scheme requirements. The proposed changes will only apply to the new domestic BPS and RDP, which will start in scheme year 2021.

The existing EU-funded BPS (claim year 2019 and earlier), and RDP schemes will continue to operate under EU law. NSA Cymru has welcomed these changes to reduce the bureaucratic burden, but we are mindful that some enterprises will already be planning for change and urge WG to clarify and confirm the rules at the earliest opportunity. This simplification consultation runs to Friday 23rd October, 2020.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region and NFU Cymru recently met and discussed farming policy issues in Wales. Topics covered included achieving 'net zero' in Wales, the current Welsh Government thinking on Sustainable Farming and Our Land, Future Food sustainability in Wales, and the current proposals for all of Wales to become an Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). NSA

is currently in the process of making a submission to Welsh Government on the NVZ situation.

NSA is also pleased to support a survey being conducted by NFU Cymru on the future of Welsh Upland farming and looks forward to discussing the outcomes at a future meeting with NFU Cymru.

### Workshops

NSA was invited by Welsh Government to attend the first of three workshops to discuss how the Covid-19 pandemic may have impacted on Brexit plans and future trade deals. These workshops are part of the Minister for Energy, Environment and Rural Affairs transition roundtable, feeding directly to the Minister and officials. The information reviewed can't be shared at this time, but it is a great opportunity for NSA to have a voice for Welsh sheep farmers in highlighting the effects of the pandemic and the potential effects downstream when we leave the EU at the end of the year.

HCC is set to bring the latest technology to upland flocks in Wales, with the aim of strengthening the Welsh sheep sector through long-term genetic improvement via changes to its Hill Ram Scheme.

In collaboration with the Hill Ram Scheme, sheep geneticist Janet Roden has developed a new Welsh Hill Sheep Breeding Index to help identify animals that thrive in the hill environment and to optimise the efficiency and economic performance of hill sheep, taking into consideration lamb growth rates, carcass weights and conformation, as well as the maternal ability of the ewe.

The full consultation document can be accessed from Welsh Government's website at: [www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-and-ourland-simplifying-agricultural-support](http://www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-and-ourland-simplifying-agricultural-support).

Continued on page 16 ▶

## Extended transition period required for a smooth change over in Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Policy is usually centred around meetings with DAERA and on those things that they are currently dealing with.

Unfortunately, our Executive had just got up and running again when Covid-19 struck, and we are only holding meetings via Zoom or Teams. Meetings are only of use when we have engagement and discussion, but civil servants' focus has turned to Covid-19 and other subjects have been put on the back burner. The actions of the Government at Westminster leaves us pondering on many unknowns with little structure to any other matters.

I listened to a recent Agriculture Committee Meeting on trade North/South and East/West. It's of particular importance to Northern Ireland and needs some sort of direction. I switched off more concerned than I was previously.

I do hope that things come together in the near future, but I'm not holding my breath. Some issues to consider include Export Health Certificates (EHC). These cost around £200 each to issue and will be required for all Products of Agricultural Origin (PAO) entering the EU. A lorry load of PAO arriving in Northern Ireland from Great Britain could contain more than 300 different food products heading to a supermarket, all needing individual EHCs.

These will be required if the product is deemed 'at risk', which is something that may move onto the south of Ireland and, thereby, enters the EU. If this requires inspections at our ports and causes the delivery to be late, even by a short time scale, that lorry may miss the distribution and delivery time, causing delays in getting to the relevant food store.

The UK will need to have a different label than those used at present, but with only a few months before Friday 1st January, 2021, there is still no

definition of what is needed. This makes it unlikely that this requirement can be met.

We definitely need an extension to the transition period to allow for a smooth change over. To those reading this and only concerned with producing livestock this may sound ironic, but the pallets used to carry products into Northern Ireland from Great Britain will need to be approved and have been heat treated to avoid any contamination entering EU. An approximate number required in a year to do this is 1.4 million pallets and, at present, nothing has been discussed about their production.

### Equilibrium

After 40 years of trading between the island of Ireland and mainland Great Britain, an equilibrium of trade has been arrived at where most lorries move in both directions fully loaded creating an efficient transport system. If there is any upset in trading and lorries are moving back and forth empty, then costs will increase. Northern Ireland must align to EU rules, old or new, whereas Great Britain will not have to. This leaves Northern Ireland vulnerable and dependent on the UK Government to 'look after us'. We have heard the phrase 'free and unfettered access' in each direction, north and south, but this must be accompanied with integrity.

A sticking-plaster approach is not acceptable. Northern Ireland needs a properly worked agreement and clear approach to the challenges of Brexit. By ignoring it the problems will not go away or solve themselves. All industry bodies and representatives, including NSA, have a huge task on our hands to convince our Brexit negotiators of the importance of a sensible trade agreement.

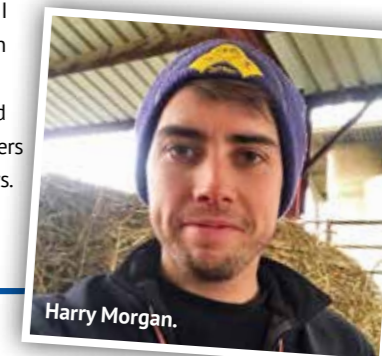
## NSA Next Generation Ambassador autumn updates



Harry Morgan is shepherd at Beeswax Dyson Farming, near Bath, and manages a mixed flock of Aberfield-type ewes and North of England Mules.

expected to lamb at the end of January followed by the late lambers, who begin lambing in April. The flock comprises 2,150 ewes - 300 North Country Mules and 1,850 ewes Innovis genetic Aberfield crosses.

truly informed on-farm decisions and we also a lot of data still to pick through from previous lambings and weight collections. That is where Agriwebb and Farm IT have come in handy. They are a great way to gather and store all our data. We are only just getting to the processing and analysis stage. I'm really looking forward to getting back to 'normality' within the NSA Next Generation group, when Covid-19 allows. It will be good to catch up with everyone and to get back out onto some farms to learn as much as I possibly can from other experienced sheep farmers and advisors.



Harry Morgan.

As ever we have been pretty busy during the past few months with shearing, combining, silaging, and weaning. And we're now onto tupping.

It's the time of year that seems to pull you from pillar to post. The first of our rams went out on 1st September, with 200 of our mule ewes synchronised using CIDRs to ensure that we have a tight lambing period, which will allow us to offer the highest level of care to all our ewes. The next mob of rams have gone out with just short of 500 of our Aberfield ewes. For this group we have used teasers during the past 14 days with the aim, again, to keep our lambing period as short as possible. This helps the livestock and lambing team.

Another 100 ewes are to be served in the coming days and that will complete tupping for our early lambing flock. All of our early lambs will be served with terminal sires, mainly Abervales, Aberblacks and Abermaxes.

We run two lambing flocks. The early group are

### Maternal

The late lambers are typically selected on maternal abilities, to allow us the option to breed our own replacements. The early lambers are selected for carcase and growth rates. We also have a huge focus on the taste of our lamb, selling quite a large proportion direct to the consumer.

We performance record all our ewes, which allows us to break down are flock into A and B groups. That said, the flock is still young with 2021 being our fourth lambing. So there is still a huge amount of data to be gathered to allow us to make



Our flock comprises 2,150 ewes – 300 North Country Mules and 1,850 ewes Innovis genetic Aberfield crosses.

Harry Morgan

NSA Next Generation Ambassador Erinna Rogers farms alongside her mother in the Cambrian Mountains. Here she gives an update on what has kept them busy during the summer months.

It has been busy on our rented hill farm with the added pressures and changes of the Covid-19 pandemic through spring and summer.

That said, I believe that we are lucky to be out in the open-air and farming during this challenging time, and we're still able to move sheep to sales and grazing.

Based up in the Cambrian mountains, we've successfully lambed hardy Welsh hill ewes and a few pedigree Texel and Texel cross ewes. This was possible with such brilliant weather during April and May, which enabled us to lamb, mark, pitch, and dose ewes and lambs, and then shepherd them out to the hills where they can teach lambs their 'heft' while roaming the mountains freely for grazing and shelter. We have done lots of gathering of our own sheep, and for neighbours, during the past few months for marking and

shearing, with changes to the ways we operate. Maintaining social distancing can be difficult with any sheep handling. Everyone works hard to maintain their distance and safety, including mealtimes. Gatherers, shearers and helpers were offered self-service, disposable outdoor catering.

### Markets

With no shows this year, I have missed catching up with friends and family. Some we only see at shows. But lately there have been a few socially distanced sheepdog trials where we have been able to catch up with friends.

Fortunately, livestock markets continued trading during the pandemic, ensuring that our sheep trade could continue. Having sold ewes and stores at local markets and from home during the summer months, the trade has been positive and

has begun to reflect the investment and work put in from all in the sheep sectors.

Next on the agenda will be autumn gathering off our SSSI hills for drawing draft ewes for sale, tupping, and off-wintering. In addition to the rented home farm, we rent additional grazing for a large percentage of our flock during the winter – to comply with environmental schemes. Who knows what will come next?

To build on the hardiness of the flock, we will be selecting white face Welsh hill tups with tight coats, strong flat bones, good length and, most importantly, short teeth to breed replacement ewes.



Erinna Rogers.

Next on the agenda will be autumn gathering off our SSSI hills for drawing draft ewes for sale, tupping, and off-wintering.

Erinna Rogers

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# Award creates opportunities and inspires change

Back in summer 2018, NSA announced that it would be working with the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England to provide travel bursaries for two young sheep enthusiasts, as part of NSA's Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the NSA Next Generation.

"The aim of this award is twofold," says NSA's Phil Stocker. "It allows us to do even more to build on our work for the next generation of sheep farmers

and it also allows us to do it in the name of Samuel Wharry, giving what I feel is an entirely appropriate recognition of all that Samuel gave to NSA.

"Samuel was NSA Board Chair at the time of his death and had just returned home after a few days on NSA business that, culminated in presenting at a conference on the subject of bringing young people into our industry," adds Mr Stocker. "Sheep farming was far more than just a business for Samuel – it was his passion. And if two things shone through that they were his interest in the practical and appropriate application of technology, and encouraging and supporting the next generation of

sheep farmers and shepherds. "Samuel's family, along with his NSA colleagues in Northern Ireland and his close friend Edward Adamson, were all fully behind the establishment of this award. I also want to thank the Merchants of the Staple of England for getting behind this award and providing significant financial support. This allows NSA to do something really valuable for the bursary recipients and the sheep industry, as well as doing something so fitting to remember Samuel by."

*Both reports can be found on the NSA Next Generation website.*



## Marie Prebble: Practical considerations for shearing in the United Kingdom

### Why focus on wool?

"The award allowed me to explore in detail an area of work that I was already passionate about, at a time when sheep shearing had been in the spotlight regarding animal welfare. The Campaign for Wool has done much to celebrate wool as a sustainable natural fibre and ethical alternative to synthetics. But we still face barriers regarding the perception of wool production, and public attitudes to sheep farming could also be improved."

### Where did the bursary take you?

Marie began her trip in France, continued to Norway, and finally visited Iceland, as well as visiting UK farms. She used a short survey to gather some hard data and was also able to gain a lot of knowledge by asking farmers to share their experiences, demonstrate skillsets, and allow photos of shearing practices to be captured.

### What were your findings?

#### 1. Fasting sheep prior to shearing:

- Evidenced that sheep are not always presented optimally for shearing.
- Suggest that sheep should ideally be fasted prior to shearing for at least eight hours.
- Multiple benefits of fasting include: preventing injury to sheep and shearers, reducing stress, improving animal welfare, and reducing contamination of fleeces.
- But there are practical implications of providing yarding facilities, ideally covered with a slatted floor. Where this is not possible, a tightly grazed paddock, prior to shearing, will suffice.
- Shearers need to be aware that breed may play a role in fasting time due to varying temperaments.

#### 2. Biosecurity:

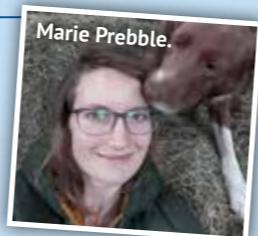
- There is concern about the potential spread of disease within or between farms during shearing.
- For non-permanent shearing set-ups, best practice includes shearers changing their clothing/shoes and disinfecting their trailer/equipment between farms.
- If possible, permanent shearing buildings on farm are favourable as they remove the need for mobile set-ups, which can potentially bring in disease.

#### 3. Infrastructure and handling systems:

- Handling systems should be optimised for efficiency and to minimise stress – not only during shearing but also for all handling events.

- Ewes should be drafted from lambs prior to shearing.
  - Facilities should be suitable for shearing regardless of whether a permanent yard or mobile hurdle system is being used.
  - Enough competent staff should be available to ensure efficient loading of shearing trailer during the day.
  - While it is accepted that some UK sheep farmers do not have access to sheds, with careful planning and perhaps more investment of time ahead of shearing, practical improvements can be made to improve the job of shearing for all concerned.
  - Suggest grant funding to improve on farm infrastructure, such as slatted floors in sheds and mobile handling yards.
- #### 4. Woolhandling and presentation
- There could be more done to differentiate and incentivise quality wool production, such as changing the payment system to allow producers to receive premiums for quality wool and rewarding good production.
  - It could be argued that higher payments for quality white wool are already in place, with payments for crossbred usually much lower. But more could be done to differentiate and incentivise quality wool production at grading.
  - Producers in Iceland and Norway receive a government subsidy for wool, which at least covers the shearing costs.
  - In Norway, a combination of more skilled woolhandlers and the use of technology to class different wool types helps to maximise the return value. In the UK, the whole fleece is graded on its overall merits or faults, rather than separating fibres from different areas on the sheep and allowing for different end uses.

"Knowledge of best practice at shearing time can definitely be improved among UK farmers and shearing contractors to the benefit of sheep welfare and promoting a better image of the shearing industry," says Marie. My study highlights the importance of communication between farmers and shearing contractors, and the need for shared responsibility for implementing and maintaining best practice. "Despite a global pandemic, the UK shearing community is hugely capable and worked hard together to get this season's shearing done efficiently. I have gained a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding best practice at shearing time from the perspectives of farmers and shearers, and will continue with a keen interest in several areas of further work highlighted during my travels."



The hill country of Orari Gorge Station.

## Charlie Beaty: Improvement and utilisation of permanent pasture to reduce the cost of production on UK sheep farms

### Why did you focus on the value of permanent pasture?

"The award allowed me to support written research with practical knowledge. It is all well and good reading about things, but until you see it working well in practice, it's difficult to ever imagine implementing it. I chose to focus on the value of permanent pasture because increasing grassland productivity would benefit our farm. It would reduce the need to feed concentrates to finish some of our lambs. With Brexit on the horizon, and the uncertainty surrounding the future of agricultural subsidies, I feel that sheep farmers should be looking to lower production costs by maximising the potential of the cheapest feed available to them – grass," explains Charlie. "Grass has the potential to be the cheapest feed, providing it is managed well. Despite this, I feel that many sheep farmers, ourselves included, do not utilise grass to its full potential."

### Where did the bursary take you?

Charlie travelled to New Zealand to investigate grassland management in more depth, producing a case study for each farm she visited. By carrying out case studies on a range of farms in diverse areas, knowledge was gained on how various methods of improvement and utilisation can be implemented on UK farms with, for example, different topography, climate, and soils. With a climate not that dissimilar to the UK, and many farmers adopting mixed cattle and sheep enterprises, Charlie could really relate to knowledge gathered further afield.

### What were your findings?

Permanent pasture is a centrepiece of UK sheep production and, when appropriately managed, can provide the most economic feed throughout the year. There is no 'standard' answer for the improvement of permanent pasture that will fit all farms. But there are a range of different options. Each farm visited had very different geological characteristics, from being predominantly hill country with vast areas of permanent pasture, to more rolling/flat country with the ability to improve pasture with reseeding or over seeding.

#### 1. Grazing Management

- On all farms there was a fine balance between over-grazing and under-grazing. So moving livestock dependent on available pasture cover was key to successful pasture management.
- The main method used by all farms visited was trying to match feed supply to livestock demand. For example, most farms allowed lambs to graze pastures first, followed by light ewes, then the main mob and finally cattle. This gave lambs access to priority grazing, encouraging increased growth rates and reduced days to slaughter.
- Integrating mixed grazing (sheep, cattle and in some cases deer) allowed the parasite burden to be controlled and led to a reduction in the use of anthelmintics. One farm reported that there was no requirement to drench their ewes due to rotational, mixed grazing. This controlled the parasite burden adequately.
- Reseeding was used on a number of farms to improve grass yields and pasture quality, but at a cost. A cheaper option (and therefore more popular choice) was to renew existing swards by over-seeding. Many farmers incorporated forage crops, mixed swards and/or legumes. Improved feed quality from these swards allowed lambs to finish faster off grass. On one

farm they used this high-quality feed for their triplet and twin bearing ewes, to avoid the need for additional concentrates pre-lambing. In addition, diverse swards further enhance the water holding capacity of the soil, increasing drought resilience.

- Interestingly, one farm opted for a single grass/clover mix, but altered the grass species between paddocks allowing for simple grazing management through the season. Varying the single grass species between paddocks allowed for variation in maturing dates of plant species and prevented late maturing varieties from being annihilated while the early maturing varieties thrive (and vice versa).
- On some farms the single biggest challenge was rainfall, but a number of farmers were using rotational grazing to increase the water holding capacity of the soil, reducing their dependence on weather.

#### 2. Infrastructure

- The use of rotational grazing requires investment in terms of additional fencing, as well as water troughs and an easy method for filling them.
- Many farmers opted for gradual investment over time to spread the costs.

#### 3. Regeneration of land

- Adopting rotational grazing practices has been shown to increase biodiversity, enriches soils, and enhances ecosystems.
- One third of the UK's soil organic carbon is found in the uplands. Adopting rotational grazing strategies can increase carbon capture in the soil and surface biomass, aiming to reduce the current trend of atmospheric accumulation
- In addition, grass-fed is seen as more 'natural' in the eye of the consumer and could lead to consumer preferences and increased consumption.

"I thoroughly enjoyed being able to visit such a diverse range of farm businesses," adds Charlie. "It was interesting to see how different farmers prioritised different aspects of their business and how management styles (of people and farm) differed. But all farms adopted a strict grazing strategy that aimed to maintain grass quality, reduce residual grazing, and help reduce parasite challenges. Ultimately, no two were the same and all had different ideas and management techniques for getting the best out of their land."



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# NSA stalwart shares his passion for sheep breeding and the wider industry

Edward Adamson, a familiar face to NSA members, is the third generation to farm at Kilroot, in County Antrim, and, with help from his son Stewart, he's the first to run a commercial sheep flock at the 440-acre (178-ha) unit.

He's also one of the very early members of NSA Northern Ireland, with more than 30 years of service under his belt.

Edward's grandfather, also Edward, took on Seaside Farm in the 1920s and his father, William, took the reins in the 1960s. "It was a dairy unit then, with a few Greyface cross-bred ewes. The business came to a bit of a crossroads in the mid-2000s – the dairy facilities were becoming tired and needed upgrading.

"But my son Stewart wasn't keen on dairy and I had introduced a few sheep – which he preferred. So the milking herd was crossed with a beef bull and, in 2005, we made the final transition into beef."

Edward explains that they had been gradually increasing the size of the flock during this time, with a particular focus on Lleyens. Today he has a 700-strong ewe flock: "These were my interest – they're good commercial sheep. My father let me go in the direction I wanted in the 1990s, and so numbers have built up gradually since then." But, as if the flock and his NSA commitment weren't enough, the unit is also home to three other smaller flocks of pedigree sheep: 20 Dutch Spotted

ewes, 50 Clun Forest ewes, and 50 Ile de France. The latter are the first to lamb, in January, indoors, followed by the Dutch Spotted and the Clun Forest in February. "We lamb the Dutch Spotted indoor – they're too valuable to risk outdoor lambing in February," says Edward, adding that the Clun Forest ewes are lambed outside.

"And the Lleyens lamb from the end of March and throughout April, also outside. It would be a lot of work – and building space – to lamb those indoors."

## Commercial

When it comes to lambing, Edward says that the Clun Forest and Lleyens are in a class of their own. "They're easy lambers – they just get on with it. And that's what's needed, particularly with a larger commercial flock. It certainly makes life easier."

The Dutch Spotted and Ile de France require a little more attention: "But their greater value means that the extra effort is worth it." He has sold Dutch Spotted breeding ewe lambs for up to £1,500 this year – and there are more females still to sell.

"Most are sold locally – all within Northern Ireland. But I have exported pedigree Ile de France embryos to the US, back in the 1990s. These formed that country's first ever Ile de France flock."

More recently he has sold 10 ewes and six rams to a sheep farmer in Eastern Europe. "We have regular enquiries through social media, but this lead came through Carroll Barber, who was also exporting Charollais."

Edward's own Ile de France flock was founded when he bought some ewes from a local sheep farmer: "Just because they were easy to buy and they were something different. That was back in

the 1990s. There are a lot of Ile de France sheep worldwide, but still relatively few in the UK. Our Carrick pedigree flock has produced breed champions at the Royal Dublin Show, Royal Welsh and Royal Ulster Shows, and I have judged the National Show in France. So we are quite well known in Ile de France circles," he says, adding that they're also a good 'meat' breed.

"They produce a good carcass and most of our Ile De France lambs go for slaughter now, typically the early Easter market, as we are quite selective when choosing breeding stock."

Edwards says that the breed is also hardy and incredible adaptable. In the US they can withstand temperatures are low as -30°C and in Australia as high as +40°C.

The Dutch Spotted caught his eye three years ago. He first saw some on NSA's stand at Balmoral Show. "And I liked the look of them. They produce a good carcass and they are pretty – so attractive to small holders who want to run small pedigree flocks. They were 'hot property' – they still are – so I decided to get in on the action."

He bought three – imported ewe lambs – to begin with and has expanded his flock with home-bred ewes, plus 13 that he bought in 2019. "We've just begun a flushing programme, to try and expand numbers a little more. We're hoping to produce at least 30 ewes from this cycle," says Edward. "And we're preparing to do another flush later this year.

"They're just so sociable – they could be marketed as the friendliest sheep in the world. All



Edward (left) and his son Stewart with some of their Dutch Spotted sheep.



Clun Forest ewe lambs.



Edward's grandson Jacob lends a hand with feeding Dutch Spotted sheep.

the other breeds we have will make a run for it as we approach, but these Dutch Spotted will actually come running if you so much as rattle the gate. And they're not looking for food, just so easy to handle and quiet and, again they also have a good carcass – not that any lambs, other than a few lesser quality, go for slaughter at the moment."

Most of his flock's lambs are sold as breeding stock, such is demand for the breed.

## Interest

Clun Forest have also seen an upsurge of interest. Edward says it's good to see the Cluns on the increase. "Again, they're pretty to look at and, at the time I first bought some, back in the 1990s, they were also quite 'odd' in their appearance. There was just the one flock in Northern Ireland, and we bought it, but now there are quite a few flocks in Ireland"

The Lleyen flocks lambing percentage is, typically, around 185% and male lambs are all fattened, with the females reared on as replacements or sold for breeding. Most are sold direct off farm, which has been a bonus this year. "Stewart and I are members of the Coop lamb producer group and most of our slaughter lambs are marketed, by Dunbia, through the Coop." Edward starts selling fat lambs from late June and some ewe lambs and surplus hoggets are sold in the autumn.

The ewes and lambs are rotationally grazed in 180 ewes (plus lambs) groups. "We have a lot of sheep to graze and that's why we lamb this flock later in the year. The more sheep you have, the better the grass growth needs to be to keep up with demand."

He does have a reseed programme for the

farm's owned acres of grassland: "And we like to add clover to the mixture. It provides a bite later in the grazing season and it also has nitrogen fixing properties. We will also sow a few acres of hybrid brassica crops in early summer to extend the grazing season. These usually fatten and finish the late lambs before they leave the farm. Forage crops are like jet fuel and certainly do the job."

Edward and Stewart also make 1,000 big bales of silage each year: "We do that ourselves and cut and bale the grass as and when required, on a field by field basis."

This helps to over-winter the sheep, as well as the farm's 60-cow suckler beef herd – a mixture of pure-bred South Devon and Aubrac cattle.

If it weren't for Covid-19, Edward says that Stewart would have been left holding the reins this year. "I'd have been off travelling on NSA business."

Edward has been involved with NSA, on all levels, since the early years of NSA in Northern Ireland – for more than 30 years. "It all started in the 1970s, when I entered a competition for a ram harness in Sheep Farmer magazine. I won and my interest and involvement in NSA and Northern Ireland's sheep industry started there. "I have a problem – I'm not very quick at jumping back in easily," he jests. That explains why he is also on various breed society committees, including the Lleyens, Ile De France and Dutch Spotted. And he's also a past recipient of the NSA's Unsung Hero award and made Associate of The Royal Agricultural Societies (ARAGS).

Edward started with NSA at grassroots level before becoming Treasurer, Chairman and then Secretary of Northern Ireland region. Today he's

## Farm facts

Unit size: 440 acres (178 ha) of which 140 acres (56 ha) are owned and 300 acres (122 ha) are rented

### Livestock

- 700 commercial Lleyen ewes
- 20 Dutch Spotted ewes
- 50 Clun Forest ewes
- 50 Ile de France ewes
- 60-cow South Devon and Aubrac suckler beef herd

Development Officer and says he thoroughly enjoys the role – even when he's not able to get off farm.

"It's great and it's been really rewarding to see the region thrive and grow – with help from the late Sam Wharry. We both had what we called 'an unhealthy interest in sheep', but it has worked out well. And it certainly helped to get the region's committee and group up and running with a good numbers of members."

Edward says that his involvement with the NSA has also afforded him the opportunity to travel: "I've been to so many places, including Russia and New Zealand. I've had so many interesting trips and wonderful opportunities."

His current project is to find a sheep unit that will host NSA Northern Ireland's regional event in 2021. "We've had it at the same local market for the past six year and it's time for a change. Sheep farmers want to see other farmers' flocks and units. That's what they're interested in and that's what we want to give them next year. So that search is on-going. It's keeping me busy while I'm unable to leave the farm."

“Lleyens are easy lambers – they just get on with it. And that's what's needed, particularly with a larger commercial flock.”



Lleyens graze at Seaside Farm in County Antrim.

# Checklist for succession success

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

The joint webinar between NSA and Roythornes focusing on Farming Succession, held in September, provides a checklist of good practice and what to avoid when planning for succession.

So what does a 'good succession' look like? Experience tells us that, in most cases, a good succession is planned, and has been revisited as circumstances change; is fair in the circumstances, and that does not necessarily mean equal shares for all; plays to the strengths and realistic aspirations of potential successors; is communicated to interested parties in advance, so there are no surprises; and it is tax efficient. The potential for bitter, expensive and drawn-out disputes if succession planning is poorly handled is real, as shown by the number of cases reaching the courts.

A recent case, in Wales, has lessons for all farming families. The parents owned a large dairy farm and had three daughters. Only one of the daughters worked on the farm, and she worked for long hours at low wages for many years, relying on her parents' assurances that the farm would one day be hers.

Following a complete breakdown in the relationship with her parents, the daughter brought a claim for compensation arguing that her parents had promised she would inherit the land and their farming business, that she had relied on that promise in working for no or low rates of pay, and that she was therefore entitled to an interest in the farm.

The case papers show that for many years there were 'a complicated series of different, sometimes mutually incompatible' expectations. Discussions about the daughter's role and future position were held but not carried through.

Documents were drawn up at various stages, but not executed (the daughter signed a partnership agreement but the parents did not, leaving the daughter mistakenly believing she was a partner in the business). There was a lack of clarity in discussions, with the distinction between land ownership and the family business not made. It is hardly surprising, then, that it has taken several court cases to resolve matters. The outcome was that the daughter was entitled to compensation of £500,000 to reflect her beneficial interest (her 'equity') in the farm and/or the farming business. On the right is a checklist which, if followed, may help to limit the risk of future litigation about who is entitled to what in relation to the farm.

To watch a recording of this NSA/Roythornes webinar, visit: [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars).



## Succession planning check list

### Make plans

- Plan in good time – take the long view. And plans should then be revisited every few years.
- Discuss the aspirations of potential successors, skills and future roles.
- Distinguish between land ownership and the farming business, such as shares in a company and interest in a farming partnership.
- If the next generation are working on the farm, make sure they are paid fairly or ensure that it is clearly understood (and set out) what their remuneration package entails.
- Consider how to cater for all family members who will be affected and not just potential successors, but also yourselves. Look at insurance policies, non-farming assets, use of farm cottages, pension provision and future roles.
- Bring in outside help if needed. A facilitator can help to 'unlock' difficult discussions.
- Get early advice on tax implications.
- Consider the unexpected, such as people dying out of turn, loss of capacity, and care costs.

### Document things

- Make sure your will is in line with what you say to the family.
- Check partnership agreements to make sure that they are also in line with your intentions.
- Use a professional to draw up formal documents.

### Avoid secrecy

- Keep plans out in the open with all family members.
- Formal family meetings, with a follow-up note or minutes, will help avoid nasty surprises.

### Revisit plans

- Take stock every few years.
- Ask, have circumstances changed?
- Are family members still on board with the plans?
- Is the original plan still tax efficient?

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Sageguard provides a database of information to aid flock and business management decisions.

# Novel tool aids decision making and promotes sustainability

By Nicola Noble, NSA

It began with iSAGE, a four-year EU-funded project that investigated the 'Innovation for Sustainable Sheep and Goat Production in Europe'.

Now, six months after the project ended, we take a deeper look into the value of the Sageguard toolkit and how it can help sheep farmers to evaluate and enhance sustainability.

The toolbox was developed from the original Public Goods Tool, which many NSA members took part in, and was used across the project to conduct around 200 on-farm sustainability assessments across Europe. It incorporates five pillars: the universally accepted four pillars of sustainability, environmental integrity, social wellbeing, economic resilience, and good governance, plus an additional pillar, Livestock, to fully explore animal health and welfare (see Figure 1).

Within each of these defined pillars are three categories, which are further divided into three sub-categories (see right hand page). These provide the framework for the different sections of the Sageguard tool, designed to act as a font of knowledge, as well as a specific tool for enhancing sustainability.

So, what can Sageguard do for sheep farmers? It provides a database of information for both

understanding and implementing sustainability practices. The information ranges from direct links to other websites and/or advisors, links to articles and even links to current scientific papers. These can be accessed by clicking on any of the sustainability pillars and then selecting farmers' particular areas of interest. This allows farmers to target their attention on areas that they wish to improve within their business.

## Sustainability

That said, it can be difficult to know where a farm sits in terms of sustainability and there might be areas that can be improved on that were not on sheep farmers' radar. So, for anyone who wants to identify their own strengths and weakness in terms of their farm business sustainability, there is an online tool called 'signposts to sustainability'.

This section is designed to encourage self-assessment of sustainability and to inform farmers about the different aspects that make up a holistically sustainable enterprise. They can assess the sustainability of their enterprise by answering the online quiz, without the hassle (and time commitment) of a formal assessment – similar to the Public Goods tool mentioned earlier.

The results are instant and displayed using an easy-to-understand traffic light system: red, which is the danger zone; red to green, which means that

there is room for improvement; and green, which is sustainable.

Farmers can then click on any of the areas and the tool will automatically direct them to the Sageguard database of information, so opportunities specific to each farmer and farm can be highlighted.

This allows farmers to draw their attention to areas of vulnerability and provide an indication of the overall status of their business, with easy access to advice on how to make specific improvements.

For anyone unfamiliar with the online environment, a small number of Sageguard cards have been produced that form a pocket tool to be used away from the farm office. These cards are also capable of supporting practical decision making in the field.

They utilise the same pillars of sustainability and are designed in the same manner as the Signposts to Sustainability online tool. The cards themselves are intended to provoke thought and discussion and are an excellent, portable tool for introducing sustainability ideas. A number of these cards are available for anyone who feels the online tool is inaccessible.

Should you be interested in obtaining a set of cards, please contact: [nicola@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:nicola@nationalsheep.org.uk).

## Categories and sub-categories within the Sageguard toolkit

### 1. Livestock

- Animal health: flock, health plan, disease incidence
- Animal welfare: feeding systems, housing characteristics, expression of natural behaviours
- Livestock management: flock productivity, genetic selection, grazing

### 2. Environmental Integrity

- Ecological: soil, water, atmosphere
- Landscape: farmland biodiversity, cultural heritage, environmental management
- Farm inputs: fertiliser, energy and carbon, waste management

### 3. Economic Resilience

- Product quality: produce, traceability, product quality
- Investment: profitability, future vision, financial viability
- Farm business resilience: other income streams, flexibility, risk management

### 4. Good Governance

- Ethics: supply chain, business planning, production
- Participation: stake holder management, community level, civic duty
- Accountability: holistic approaches, performance assessments, integrating principles

### 5. Social Well Being

- Internal to business: working conditions, decent livelihood, education
- External to business: community engagement, acceptable practices, multifunctionality
- Social activity, responsibility: social activities, fair trading practices, human health and safety

Figure 1. The five pillars of sustainability



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# Making Scotch Lamb a shopping staple

By Laura Strang, QMS

Farmers have an important role to play in encouraging consumers to view Scotch Lamb PGI as a shopping essential and to help promote it as a versatile, quick and easy ingredient to cook with midweek.

So says Fife-based sheep farmer and QMS Board Member, George Milne. "Lamb is an unsung hero of Scottish produce and, by being at the forefront of showcasing its versatility and fantastic taste, we can promote to the public the time and dedication we, as farmers, put in to rearing an animal to some of the highest welfare and environmental standards in the world," he says. George is a passionate advocate of farm visits and the need for children to be exposed to agriculture before they leave school, and wants to help inspire consumers to include home-produced Scotch Lamb in their regular diet.

"Consumers should be proud of Scottish agriculture and the farmers that produce their

food. We undoubtedly have an opportunity to try and connect closer to the consumer by making the most of the opportunities that QMS provide through social media, in particular.

"Although the ordinary face-to-face methods of interaction, such as farm visits, are not available to us right now, we can use this opportunity to take a step back and to take a few steps forward when it comes to educating and building trust with consumers," he adds.

## Catalysts

With the recent launch of the joint GB-wide 'Make it' with Lamb campaign, George says that the combination of the warm weather and an increase in home cooking are ideal catalysts for farmers to get involved and encourage consumers to give Scotch Lamb a try.

"During the summer and early autumn months, many turn to the BBQ for cooking evening meals and traditionally that meant reaching for sausages or burgers. But what we need to be promoting is that higher quality cuts of meat are just as suited to the BBQ. "Take, for instance, a leg of lamb.

It's an incredibly flavoursome and nutrient rich meat and, while some might be intimidated to try cooking it on the BBQ, with the current weather it's so easy." Cooking requires removing the bone and 'butterflying' the meat (or ask the butcher to do this), place it on the BBQ on high heat to seal the meat and then turn to a low temperature and cook for about 40 minutes, turning a few times.

Remove from the BBQ and rest the joint for 10 minutes and then carve. This will taste delicious and comfortably feed eight people.

"We are producing a high-quality product and there are a number of ways that we can help drive a positive relationship, built on mutual trust and respect. It can be as simple as submitting your favourite lamb recipe to your local newspaper, sharing information about how it is reared on social media, or simply sharing and supporting content from the Scotch Kitchen or QMS social channels," adds George.



George Milne

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# First results of Welsh Lamb taste testing revealed

PGI Welsh Lamb has earned a reputation across the globe as being a high quality and premium product.

In order to maintain this status, there is a need to understand the factors behind consumers' preference and what can affect the eating quality of lamb.

Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) will assess Welsh Lamb meat quality to help enhance quality and consistency throughout the supply chain and to ensure that chefs and discerning diners continue to choose Welsh Lamb for years to come.

Following a series of taste panel events in January and February 2020, the Welsh Lamb Meat Quality Project's first set of results show that consumers are willing to pay more for higher quality lamb meat and that shoppers' age, gender, locality and occupation had a significant and different effect on their concepts of value and their purchasing behaviour.

To date, almost 500 UK shoppers have tasted and rated seven pieces of Welsh Lamb at specialist sessions. Throughout the project's duration nearly 2,000 consumers from across the UK will sample Welsh Lamb to establish eating quality guidelines.

Each year different on-farm and processor related factors will be tested to evaluate the impact on eating quality. This first trial

explored the treatment effects of three different breed types (hill, crossbred and terminal sired lambs), meat cuts (analysing loin, topside and chump) and lamb gender (investigating ram lambs and castrated lambs) and their effect on eating quality. Lambs were sourced from 22 different farms across Wales.

## Consistently

The consumers ate lamb that had been cooked consistently and were asked to score each piece on meat eating quality traits including aroma, tenderness, juiciness, flavour and overall liking.

Statistical analysis of the meat eating quality data revealed that samplers could taste the difference in muscle cut, but there was no significant taste difference between breed type or lamb gender. The majority of cuts scored well by all consumers for palatability, with the loin and chump scored particularly highly by the consumers for all eating quality traits.

For all three muscles, 80% of consumers rated the lamb at satisfactory everyday quality, better than everyday quality and premium quality. Nearly half of the consumers (46.5%) rated both the loin and chump muscle at better than everyday and premium quality.

"This first trial demonstrated some interesting results and showed that consumers enjoyed the taste and flavour of all cuts presented, particularly the loin and the chump," says HCC Meat Quality

Executive Eleri Thomas, who leads the in-house taste project team.

"Consumers were willing to pay more for higher quality lamb meat, such as Welsh Lamb, with younger consumers in particular willing to pay more for quality.

"This is important for all parts of the supply chain and confirms that the more expensive lamb meat cuts do, indeed, have better eating quality," adds Dr Thomas.

Overall, the meat tasters' answers showed differences in lamb purchasing behaviour associated with consumer gender, age, panel location and individual occupation. Dr Thomas believes, "such customer feedback is essential in the foodservice and retail trade. Repeat purchases and buying trend information is valuable, but there is nothing better than direct, honest consumer reactions to a product.

## Experience

"The consumer taste test results will inform the supply chain about the practices that can improve lamb meat eating quality and enhance the Welsh Lamb eating quality experience for the modern consumer."

Work is currently underway for the second trial, which will investigate the effect of lambs' finishing diets and the ageing period of meat on the quality.

*The full eating quality findings from the first trial are available at [www.hybu.cymru](http://www.hybu.cymru).*



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On-farm factors can play a role in lamb eating quality.



# Tackling tick-borne diseases in sheep

There have been several cases of tick-borne diseases reported during the early months of 2020, which are probably a result of the relatively mild winter weather.

A case of tick-borne fever was recorded in sheep in North Wales as early as the end of January. In April, 23 young lambs died after showing malaise and anaemia. From a flock based in the South East, they were infested with large numbers of ticks and were suffering from tick pyaemia. Some farms have reported heavy lamb losses.

*Ixodes ricinus*, the Latin name for the sheep, deer or castor bean tick, is the most common tick associated with outbreaks of clinical disease in UK. This tick is found mainly in areas of rough grazing, moorland, woodland and areas where wild deer and rabbit are in abundance.

However there have been reports this year of severe infestations, disease and deaths in sheep grazing the South Downs that are associated with the less common red sheep tick, *Haemaphysalis punctata*. This is predominantly an ectoparasite of livestock, but severe infestations on horses and human biting incidents have also been reported. This tick inhabits grassland, including downland and coastal marshland, rather than the rough grazing that *Ixodes ricinus* requires. It appears to have expanded its range in southern England in recent years.

Ticks feed for relatively short periods and spend most of their lives in the environment,

occupying specific biotopes. The epidemiology of ticks and tick-borne disease is, therefore, governed by climate and land use. Climate change, greening, wildlife conservation (particularly deer, which act as maintenance hosts) and creation of wildlife corridors contribute to expansion in geographical ranges.

## Neutrophils

*Anaplasma phagocytophilum* multiplies in the white blood cells called neutrophils, which are destroyed, and this results in profound neutropenia, an abnormally low concentration of neutrophils in the blood, that persists for between two and three weeks.

Clinical signs in sheep include high fever (higher than 40°C), polyarthritis, ill thrift or abortion. Pregnant sheep exposed to infected ticks for the first time are likely to abort. Naïve rams may be infertile for up to one month after infection. The destruction of these white blood cells makes the animals immunosuppressed, leaving them vulnerable to infection, such as: pneumonia; septicaemia, due to *Biberstina sp*; louping ill, or tick pyaemia.

The introduction of a PCR for TBF has made diagnosis easier. It has identified situations where movement of naïve ewes and lambs onto tick infested pastures has led to infection with *A. phagocytophilum* and other concurrent infections.

Louping ill is caused by a flavivirus known as

louping ill virus (LIV), which is transmitted by *Ixodes ricinus* ticks. It affects predominantly sheep and red grouse, but can affect humans, cattle and other animals. Following the infected tick bite, the LIV multiplies in the drainage lymph node and then is carried via the blood to the central nervous system. In areas where louping ill is endemic, sheep younger than two years old are most commonly affected, as older animals have acquired immunity.

## Seizures

Affected sheep may display a high stepping gait (particularly the hindlegs) and this may progress to seizures, paralysis, coma, and death. Some animals may only display milder signs when under exertion, such as during gathering. Lambs are protected for between two and three months by colostral antibodies. Diagnosis is by histopathology of the brain or virus isolation following postmortem examination.

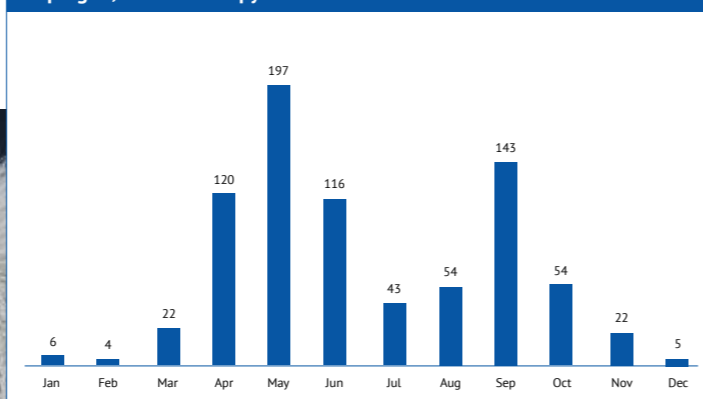
Louping ill vaccine is not currently available. In the absence of a vaccine the Moredun Institute has produced a booklet: 'Best practice guidelines for LIV control in sheep flocks and on grouse moors in the absence of a vaccine'.

Download a copy at: [www.moredun.org.uk/sites/default/files/louping\\_ill\\_best\\_practice\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.moredun.org.uk/sites/default/files/louping_ill_best_practice_booklet.pdf)



By Amanda Carson, APHA

Figure 1: Count of GB VIDA diagnoses and seasonal distribution for louping ill, TBF and tick pyaemia 2002 - 2019



## Diseases transmitted by ticks

**Protozoa** – Babesiosis, theileriosis,

**Bacteria** – Tick-borne fever, Lyme borreliosis.

**Virus** – Louping ill

**Zoonoses** – Lyme disease (*Borrelia burgdorferi, sensu lato*), human babesiosis, human granulocytic anaplasmosis and louping ill are the most common. Recently tick-borne encephalitis virus, which is endemic in many European countries, has been found for the first time in a very small number of ticks in two locations in England.

**Tick-borne fever** – Tick-borne fever (TBF) is caused by *Anaplasma phagocytophilum* and transmitted by *Ixodes ricinus*.

Tick pyaemia is caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* and may present as either a septicaemia or localised abscess formation. Typically, two-to-ten-week-old lambs are affected. Abscesses can be found in a wide range of locations and this determines the clinical disease seen. Presentations can vary from dull, poorly thriving lambs to lameness or neurological signs and sudden death.

## Inoculation

The bacteria are believed to gain entry into the bloodstream either by direct inoculation during tick feeding or from local superficial wounds. But the immunosuppressive effect of concurrent *A. phagocytophilum* infection can aid the development of tick pyaemia. Control is dependent on reducing exposure to ticks.

The seasonal distribution of louping ill, TBF and tick pyaemia are shown in Figure 1. There have not been confirmed reports of resistance to acaricides in the UK, but there have been reports in reduction in persistency of products when animals are faced with large numbers of ticks (see Table 1 for tick prevention treatments for sheep).

Table 1: Tick prevention treatments for sheep (always check up-to-date data sheets)

<b>Chemical</b>	Organophosphate Diazinon
<b>Application</b>	Plunge dip
<b>Use</b>	Prevent and treat ticks
<b>Persistence</b>	Will depend on: the species of tick and its feeding habits; the level of challenge; and the location of sheep post dipping.
<b>Comments</b>	Operator safety, dip licensing and disposal. Mobile dippers may be an alternative. Interaction with Levamisole
<b>Chemical</b>	Synthetic pyrethroids (various- deltamethrin, cypermethrin, cypermethrin alpha)
<b>Application</b>	Topical (spot or pour-on)
<b>Use</b>	For the treatment and control of ticks
<b>Persistence</b>	Varies from not recorded to 12 weeks
<b>Comments</b>	Some not for use in lambs less than one week. Some have specific measures for lambs less than 10kg

Useful links and further information on APHA's focus article on tickborne diseases of sheep can be found in the Veterinary Record. [www.veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/vr.m1352?ijkey=zfA3mHnyqYvLA&keytype=ref&siteid=bmjournals](http://www.veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/vr.m1352?ijkey=zfA3mHnyqYvLA&keytype=ref&siteid=bmjournals).

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## Parasite Matters – Autumn 2020

Elanco

We've had a warm and dry spring, wetter June/July (but not everywhere) and the first half of August was warm, wet and humid. What impact is this likely to be having on parasite challenges as we move into the late summer and autumn?

The NADIS blowfly risk has moved to "Severe" for the entire country.

Despite the cooling temperatures, extremely high blowfly populations and damp conditions mean that strike risk remains severe across the UK and is likely to remain high for the next few weeks. Since treatment applied to ewes after shearing may now be nearing the end of its period of active protection, considerable care is needed to avoid serious cases of strike.

Richard Wall, Professor of Zoology (Ectoparasite Specialist).

As fly numbers peak any gaps in application will be exploited by the high fly numbers. View the latest risk forecast at: <https://alerts.nadis.org.uk/>

After a largely dry year in the South, the wet and humid conditions in the first half of August is likely to lead to a rapid rise in worm challenge. Monitor worm egg counts and think about timings for mid/late season Zolvix break dose. Find out more at: [www.scops.org.uk/news/5221/sheep-farmers-encouraged-to-use-newer-wormers-as-a-mid-season-lamb-dose-this-summer/](http://www.scops.org.uk/news/5221/sheep-farmers-encouraged-to-use-newer-wormers-as-a-mid-season-lamb-dose-this-summer/)

Liver fluke – last year was a generally low challenge year for liver fluke which came later in the season. The dry spring and wetter summer this year could give very localised areas of high challenge, while leaving other areas with little or no fluke challenge until much later in the season. Checking for liver fluke antibodies in lambs (or calves) will tell you if the fluke challenge has started on your farm. Watch the experts discuss: [www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/webinars](http://www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/webinars)

Get the latest parasite updates direct to your inbox. Sign up to our Enewsletter: [www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/sign-up](http://www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/sign-up)

Matthew Colston  
Ruminant Technical Consultant, Elanco



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Ticks on the nose of a Herdwick sheep.

# Auditing is key to navigating the mineral minefield

By Peter Bone, Fiona Lovatt & Phillipa Page 

Mineral nutrition has been described as a minefield – what to replace, when to give it and how much is enough without being too much?

It would be so easy if poor growth rates or poor fertility were always accounted for by a simple mineral deficiency and the remedy could be simply purchased in a bottle, bolus or block.

But, of course, the real devil is always in the detail and mineral nutrition can never be considered in isolation or without overall assessment of total food supply, energy and protein levels, as well as overall sheep health and the compounding effects of underlying disease or worm and fluke burdens. That said, whole farm mineral auditing is a technique that is being increasingly used to tease out the details of mineral nutrition on any one farm or in any one flock.

Trace-elements are minerals – including copper, selenium, cobalt, iodine, manganese, zinc – that are essential for life. It is vital to supply them at the correct level for optimum flock performance. With certain minerals, such as copper, additional factors such as iron, sulphur and molybdenum levels have to be considered, as these could affect copper uptake by the animal.

In the first instance, auditing investigations typically involve assessing all animal inputs throughout the year, including consideration of the fields that the animals graze, as well as any additional food supplies, blocks, buckets and treatments. The farm is systematically mapped out and all historical laboratory sample results are collected together and assessed.

Gathering up-to-date flock information starts

with forage sampling, whether it is being grazed or has been conserved, and water samples, if it's not from a mains supply. It may also be necessary to take blood or liver samples from sheep. Finally soil samples may be considered. Despite the fact that soil type and pH obviously influences mineral content, there is great variation in what the grass takes out of the soil and what the animals absorb from the forage. So soil is not usually the place to start an investigation.

## Assess

This whole-farm approach is needed to accurately assess the likely supply to different livestock groups throughout the year and to identify times when there may be either under- or over-supply.

Different categories of sheep (lambs, growing ewes, mature ewes and rams) have different requirements, which vary depending on the time of year and their physiological needs and activity. These must be set against what is already available from their primary source of feed, which is forage.

Many farm systems have adopted a belt-and-braces approach and may supply trace elements in the form of boluses, as well as a whole range of free access licks, buckets, drenches, injections and supplementary feed from a bag at certain times of year. Oversupply is seen just as often as deficiencies, with one or more of the trace elements. Oversupply can result in unnecessary costs that ultimately affect the bottom line or, at worst, cause toxicity issues with unfortunate consequences.

Assessing the need to supplement at key times of low supply and identifying the most beneficial remedies are key to a profitable system that works throughout the whole sheep year.

Where there are deficiencies in the flock a decrease in performance occurs. This can be related to the primary deficiency and its effect on growth rates or flock fertility or immune function. An animal that is selenium deficient, for example, will be significantly less able to deal with other diseases, such as a parasite burden or a challenge from Pasteurella.

In the treatment of a clinical deficiency, drenches and injectables have their place, but it is important to realise that there is not necessarily a direct correlation between quality and price. It is never reasonable to expect to get more than a week or so of cobalt out of any drench, as it is only active while in the rumen. In contrast, selenium levels will usually stay high for at least six weeks.

Where it has been identified that a longer-term supply is necessary, the higher quality oral boluses can offer a targeted and specific approach to managing trace-element nutrition during a sustained time period.

## Deficiency

A mineral audit often reveals a low point during the summer and this year has seen cases of cobalt deficiency in growing lambs, compounded by worm burdens that are sometimes also resistant to the anthelmintic used. In a number of flocks, there have been significant effects on growth rates after weaning, resulting in severe delays in lamb crop finishing compared to previous years.

Lambs have presented with low levels of vitamin B12 (produced from cobalt utilisation by rumen bugs) on blood samples, as well as clinical signs of cobalt deficiency such as poor daily weight gains, open fleeces and crusting of the skin on the ears. In these cases, careful veterinary investigation is required to tease out the provision



Supplementing ewes and lambs at grazing.

of suitable grazing, the importance of the worm burden, the efficacy of the anthelmintic used, and the contribution from poor cobalt supply.

## Identification

There is a huge benefit to earlier identification of potentially low cobalt levels from forage analysis so preventative measures can be put into place before blood vitamin B12 levels fall and the lambs' growth rates suffer.

What is your trace element approach? It cannot be one of 'more is better' or 'just in case,' but it is important to establish the whole on-farm trace-element picture. Alongside your trusted vet, align any necessary extra supply with the requirements of the 'ewe-year' while also considering the bigger picture and other factors, such as disease. For many people, mineral nutrition has become an expensive minefield, but we are unravelling the mystery by careful auditing and then advising appropriate action based on the evidence.

*Farmers in Wales may be able to access a mineral audit via Farming Connect and should contact their Development Officer if they are interested.*

Mineral auditing questions for each group of sheep, at each stage of the year

- What type of stock?
- How many in group?
- Where are they?
- What is their water source?
- What is their main forage source?
- What other food do they have access to?
- Is there a mineral supplement added to the ration?
- Are there free-access minerals available?
- Is there access to any additional buckets or blocks?
- Have boluses been given?
- If yes, what type and when?
- Have injections been given?
- If yes, what type and when?
- Have drenches been given?
- If yes, what type and when?
- Have any samples been taken?
- If yes, what type and when?

Forage analysis plays a key role in assessing a flock's requirement for mineral supplementation.



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# Getting to the root of thistle problems in sheep grazing

TECHNICAL

Thistles are the grassland weeds of greatest concern to sheep farmers because they not only grow where grass should be, but their prickly nature can also help spread orf.

More than a million hectares of UK grassland are estimated to be infested with 20 species of thistles – the two most common and damaging being creeping and spear thistles.

Perennial creeping thistle grows both from seed and root sections. Once established, the root mass can be larger than the leaves and stem growing above ground. If cut, roots will produce more shoots from sections as little as 2.5cm long. Roots of one plant can cover up to 5m<sup>2</sup> in one year and up to 80m<sup>2</sup> in two years, with the weight of underground roots being as much as 2t/ha. These underground growing systems enable creeping thistles to withstand adverse conditions such as drought much better than grass.

## Rosette

Spear thistle is biennial, growing from seed. In its first year it may go unnoticed as it only produces a small rosette. In the second year it can grow to over a metre in diameter before flowering. Different to creeping thistle, the plant does not have extensive lateral roots but one long tap root instead. Each flower can produce up to three million seeds which are viable for more than three years.

In 1991, scientists at the Institute of Grassland Research (IGER) were looking at the impact of different nutrients on grass growth. They also

noticed that sheep grazing was affected in fields where thistles were growing – with the animals avoiding up to 0.5m<sup>2</sup> around each thistle plant.

In practice this means there is a 'ring-fence' around each thistle plant where sheep will not graze unless forced to by a lack of other forage.

Thistle populations can be calculated simply by counting the number of thistles in an area measuring 5m by 7m. One weed represents 1% weed infestation. Trial data from the SRUC shows that a 10% infestation causes a corresponding 10% loss of grass yield.

Thistles are a danger to unsuspecting lambs that can scratch themselves across their mouth and lips, or at the horn/hoof junction on their legs, if they venture beyond the 'ring-fence'.

This gives an ideal entry point for the pox virus, if present on the farm, which manifests as contagious pustular dermatitis (CPD) or orf. Outbreaks may occur within 10 to 14 days of ewes and lambs entering thistle-ridden pastures.

Characterised by scabby, bloody lesions on the lambs' faces, and often present on ewe's teats, orf can be transferred to humans. With the scabs most commonly seen on people's hands, it is advisable to wear gloves when handling infected animals.

Infection normally runs a course of four to six weeks and the disease, which is rarely fatal, in young lambs is associated with poor growth. Infected animals can be 2.2kg lighter than lambs of comparable sizes on the same nutrition.

The cost of orf has been estimated to be from £1 to more than £14 per ewe, depending on the severity of the cases. There is no treatment but strategic vaccination on farms where it is present, can give short-term protection.

It is important to control thistles in fields

ear-marked for next year's lambing or where ewes and their new-borns will be turned out first. But control of creeping thistle can be challenging due to its extensive root system.

"Cultural control is possible but trials have shown that it has to be cut at least twice in the growing season, for several years, to reduce populations effectively," explains Corteva Agrisciences' David Gurney.

## Cutting

"Removal of the apical bud on a dominant creeping thistle shoot by cutting, results in the root system growing more shoots to survive.

This is the reason farmers often see a flush of new creeping thistle plants after mowing them.

"A labour-intensive cutting regime eventually weakens the plants and their capacity to produce new shoots, flowers and seeds.

But spraying with an effective translocated herbicide is usually a better method of control." Translocated herbicides containing triclopyr and clopyralid that are applied in late summer or early autumn to actively growing thistles, pre-flowering, can be particularly successful.

"If there is a lot of uneven thistle growth in a field, ranging from young plants in the rosette stage to those already up and flowering, it is worth topping the weeds two to three weeks before the planned spray date," says Mr Gurney.

"This will give plants the chance to regrow all at the same stage. Topping them will also encourage more shoots, resulting in a greater area of leaf to target with the herbicide. This will help to maximise the amount of chemical that reaches the roots."

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# Scab diagnosis and prevention pointers to help control disease

By John Hemingway, Shropshire Farm Vets



TECHNICAL

Sheep scab is undoubtedly one of the most frustrating parasitic diseases that sheep farmers encounter and, as autumn approaches, we tend to see a substantial rise in the number of cases.

This is no surprise, with the autumn store trade probably constituting the biggest mass movement of sheep around the country each year – many of them having been through livestock market in the process.

Add to this the fact that the lower autumn temperatures allow scab mites to survive longer in the environment, and we can see why this time of year presents the highest risk of scab infection.

Buying in sheep is not the only route by which flocks become infected, common grazing or close contact with neighbouring flocks also pose substantial risks. The parasite can also be spread via contaminated clothing or shearing equipment. Sheep scab mites can also live on (and be spread by) cattle, although that probably contributes relatively little to spread of the disease.

The cost of treatment against this parasite alone costs the UK sheep industry more than of £8 million per year.

Sheep scab is caused by *Psoroptes ovis* mites, which are too small to be seen with the naked eye and can only be properly identified under a microscope. Despite the intense irritation that they cause, they do not burrow deep into the skin but, instead, feed on surface skin debris. The symptoms seen in infested sheep are the result of an allergic reaction to the mite and its faeces, rather than to the feeding activity of the parasite itself.

Female scab mites lay one or two eggs per day, which take around two weeks to develop into adult mites. They then live as adults for between 40 and 50 days.

The mite is able to survive for some time off the sheep, while remaining able to re-infect a new host – if it comes across one. Under favourable conditions, scab mites can stay alive and infectious for 17 days on gateposts, fences and trailers, as well as on loose wool tags, clothing, shearing equipment and more or less anything else. It is this 'off host' survival tactic that is responsible for the parasite's ability to spread between flocks.

## Symptoms

Most people have seen the classic symptoms of sheep scab. Initially there is itching, rubbing against fences, restlessness, head tossing and chewing or nibbling at the flanks. Over time, mite numbers increase and symptoms intensify to include wool loss, crusting and bleeding from the affected areas, and sometimes bacterial skin infection or flystrike. In extreme cases, neurological symptoms, such as seizures, can occur and death can be the result.

Time spent itching and rubbing leads to a substantial drop in the time spent grazing, and sheep with scab lose condition rapidly. This is of particular importance if sheep are infected during pregnancy, where loss of condition results in reduced birth weights, poorer colostrum quality and lower milk yields.

Despite the classic symptoms being commonly known, spotting early disease is difficult. When sheep are initially infected, they often show no symptoms until mite numbers have really begun to escalate, which can often take between six or seven weeks. Similarly, some individuals are able to contract and spread the parasite without ever developing symptoms. As a result, there has usually

been ample time for the parasite to spread throughout your flock by the time 'itchy sheep' begin to appear.

## Diagnosis

Diseases causing 'itchy sheep' are frequently mistaken for one another because a proper diagnosis is not sought. Conditions commonly confused with sheep scab include lice, 'lumpy wool', and, less commonly, scrapie. Failure to reach a diagnosis can lead to the incorrect treatment being given, which costs money and labour, and allows more time for the scab symptoms to worsen.

The quickest and best way to diagnose sheep scab is to have skin scrapes and wool plucks collected and examined under a microscope. The presence of a single live scab mite constitutes a positive diagnosis. Failure to find any mites does not completely rule out scab as a diagnosis, particularly in the early stages. But if sufficient samples are taken and examined patiently by the vet, the mite can usually be found, giving a conclusive, same-day diagnosis.

A blood test is also available, which can reliably show whether an animal has been exposed to scab mites. However, this test must be interpreted with caution, as a positive result only indicates that the sheep has had scab at some point, and not that it is necessarily harbouring the parasite at the time of testing.

## Treatment

Treatment must be carried out as soon as scab is diagnosed, as this disease constitutes a serious welfare issue. There are only two available treatment options; plunge dipping or injection with macrocyclic lactones. In either case, the success of the treatment depends on every single animal being treated properly and no animals being missed.

A single sheep that is missed or under-dosed when injected, or not submerged properly when dipping, can lead to reinfection of the flock, and a perceived treatment failure.

Macrocyclic lactone drugs include ivermectin, doramectin and moxidectin. To 'cover' the animals for long enough to prevent reinfection from mites living in the environment, two injections that are given seven days apart are typically required, unless a 'long-acting' preparation of moxidectin is being used. The key disadvantage of using these products to treat scab is that each time we use injectable macrocyclic lactones, we are inadvertently also



The *Psoroptes ovis* mite, as seen through the microscope.



Wool loss and self-inflicted trauma from biting at the flank.

Continued on page 38



An affordable blood test can be used, alongside skin scrapes or wool plucks, to diagnose infection.

worming the sheep. And repeated use of these products will lead to the further development of gastrointestinal worm resistance to this group of products. To complicate matters further, we have now seen the development of resistance to these products within the scab mite population, and reported treatment failures due to parasite resistance are on the rise.

Plunge dipping using an organophosphate dip is the only other way of treating sheep scab. It carries the advantage of not also acting as a wormer, so poses no danger of contributing to anthelmintic resistance. But dipping obviously requires specialist equipment and licensing to carry out, or the employment of a mobile dipping service. To be successful, the process relies on all sheep spending the required minimum time in the dip (typically one minute), as well as being fully submerged at least once. It also relies on the dipping solution being replenished frequently in line with the manufacturer's instructions.

It is worth mentioning that the use of organophosphates in sheep showers or jetting equipment is ineffective in controlling sheep

scab, and exposing scab mites to anything other than full immersion of the animal could lead to the development of resistance to organophosphate products.

### Prevention

As with all diseases, prevention is better than cure. With sheep scab, this simply means reducing the likelihood of your flock coming into contact with other potentially infected animals, or areas where infected animals may recently have been. In practice, of course, this is often easier said than done, particularly in situations when it is necessary to buy stock through markets.

To help reduce the risk, the use of an injectable macrocyclic lactone must always be part of your quarantine protocol for incoming stock, along with the longest practicable period of isolation before mixing new animals with your existing flock. There is also increasing interest in using the aforementioned blood test on recently bought-in animals as an indicator of whether they may have contracted the parasite during market sale or transit.

### Scab facts

- Sheep Scab is caused by a tiny mite which cannot be seen with the naked eye.
- The mite can survive and remain infectious in the environment for up to 17 days.
- It can take up to seven weeks after infection before symptoms become obvious. Some individuals may never show signs.
- Diagnosis is important and is done with skin scrapes and wool plucks, aided by a blood test if necessary.
- Treatment is either with injectable 3-MLs or by OP plunge dipping. Showering or jetting are ineffective.
- Scab mites with resistance to injectable 3-MLs are now not uncommon, but other potential causes of treatment failure should be ruled out before assuming this is the case.

## TAKE THE PLUNGE! ...NOT A SHOWER



OP must get down to the skin to kill sheep scab mites. This can only be done by plunge dipping sheep for one minute.



OP dip is only authorised for use as a plunge dip. It must not be used through showers or jetters.

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# Following the flock

Three sheep farmers – Eddie Eastman from Cumbria, and Howard Tratt and Kevin Harrison from Somerset – share their summer 2020 experiences

## Kevin Harrison

English Committee Chairman, Somerset

I believe I ended my previous contribution to 'Following the Flock' with the words 'what could possibly go wrong?'

Well you can certainly say there's been plenty that's gone wrong in 2020 but, to be fair to the sheep, they have done their job well this year and seem to be the one constant during turbulent times. In late spring/early summer we were wondering where our next blade of grass was coming from. But with the sudden change in weather we had an abundance of grass and we were able to finish the final few lambs off the grass, which was a welcome change.

I'm pleased with the speed the lambs finished this year, but they don't seem to be grading so well. Maybe I was rushing them a little bit to try and catch the high price, which never really dropped. We weaned early due to the lack of grass, but the ewes are now in excellent condition going forward because of the tremendous grass growth we have had through the summer.

With all the sheep 'behaving', I can turn my mind to other issues. The next Zoom meeting, the next webinar, my broadband speed, ELMS, The Pathway, the Rumen Health Group. Oh, and we mustn't forget that we still have the dreaded Brexit around the corner.



Kevin's sheep have performed well this season.



Howard has expanded his flock this year.

## Howard Tratt

South West Region Chairman, Somerset

The sun is shining and there is a nice flush of grass growth. But, despite this, we're struggling with a lack of 'clean' grazing, which is hindering lamb performance.

A lot of mid-April born lambs are hovering around 35kgLW. Other than keeping some back for the local butcher, a good store trade sees no reason to hold on to them.

Ewes are a bit leaner than I would like for this time of year, but it is understandable after they worked hard through the dry spell in early spring. Hopefully another six weeks of better grazing will see them gain a condition score. Prioritising grazing for the ewes is another reason to shift the lambs as stores.

I have decided to move to a whole flock of wool shedders, adding to numbers with 60 Exlana four-tooth ewes bought from a local flock dispersal. That will mean around 220 ewes for tugging this season.

The Easycare ewe lambs I bought in a year ago, and ran on, have grown into some nice ewes. The two main objectives with them now is to prevent them from getting too fat and from breaking into Mr Thatcher's orchards!



## Eddie Eastham

UK Policy & Technical Chairman, Cumbria

We have managed to conserve some quality forage during brief spells of dry weather and now have grass in abundance, following long periods of warm and wet conditions.

However, some of the lower ground is becoming waterlogged and we really need a decent dry spell before winter. Sales of our young breeding sheep are now underway and, so far, values have met and exceeded expectations. On many farms these sales are a high point in the calendar, with family members being involved in the year-long production process that culminates with the preparation for sale. While some methods of trading breeding sheep bypass the public auction system, many are still sold at traditional annual events. These sales not only allow prospective customers and sellers to come together, but also provide the opportunity for breeders to have their efforts judged, and hopefully admired, by fellow breeders. The cultural and social value of these events is highly important, bringing together people and communities who share mutual interests. For obvious reasons, this social interaction is subdued this year, making many who live and work in rural areas feel more isolated. Hopefully these sales and other events will be able to take place in a more 'normal' way next year, allowing business and pleasure to mix in the time-honoured way.



Eddie has plenty of forage to feed his flock this coming winter.

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