

# SHEEP FARMER

APRIL / MAY 2021

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## Be a winner – and know NSA is supporting you

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER  
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We face winning and losing almost every day, in many ways. But currently the stakes could not be higher.

For years I and many others have been saying change is coming and we have to be prepared. It's easy to say and there are many things farmers can do, and have done, to make their businesses more resilient. But I've also said, repeatedly, that we need a clearer vision on the direction we're expected to take. That's something that has been absent and NSA has been working hard to ensure the vision is a shared one – and one we all think is fair.

We have experienced a year of strong sheep prices. These are prices that may have been exceptional but should, in reality, be the norm. One of the Government's key challenges to the industry is to improve our productivity, with productivity being a measure of efficiency and profitability. The English, Northern Irish, and Welsh governments have made no secret of their intention to phase out support for farming businesses, expecting enterprises to stand on their own feet, and replacing any farm support with capital investment, measures to improve efficiency, and payment for public goods.

### Inflation

Increasing the value of our livestock and crops is likely to be one way of increasing profitability. And if processors and others in the supply chain are to make a margin then we need food inflation. We also need people to accept a larger proportion of their disposable income being spent on food. Food is, after all, the most essential requirement for life and should be valued far more than it is.

There are several factors behind our current strong prices. Covid-19 means eating out has not been an option and, retailers, be they high-street butchers, farm shops or supermarkets, are far stronger supporters of British product. Livestock markets also worked hard to stay open and helped drive competition.

Many sheep farmers sold lambs before the end of 2020, to avoid the risks associated with a no-deal Brexit. And then the advertising and

promotions, which were planned to prepare for a potentially difficult time, all underlined that, with effort, we can make our markets work for us. But behind this the global supply and demand dynamics are in our favour. All of this means there will be ups and downs but we should be optimistic about our future.

### Influencer

While the market is a huge influencer there are other forces at work that are already creating winners and losers. It's sad, but a fact of life, that the 'industry' at large can be assessed as a winner even though certain individuals within it may be losers. Take Northern Ireland as an example. Currently there appears to be no solutions for the GB Blackface and Swaledale breeders who traditionally sell to NI's sheep farmers – or for the NI farmers dependent on the British market for selling pedigree rams.

Similarly, right across the UK, there are skilled breeders of pedigree and commercial stock who have worked hard to develop markets across Europe and beyond. Some have lost valuable trade into EU from farmers who are keen to buy quality sheep from professional British breeders. Until we see the establishment of a border control point on the other side of the Channel that can handle live animals, this trade is halted.

Everyone has a choice about how they deal with change, but it's important the individual/family stays in control and makes the right decisions for them. One fundamental question is whether you can resist being pushed in a direction not of your choosing and succeed, despite the changes going on around you. Or whether it's better to ride the wave and take the best route you can find.

NSA's position is clear. We want both our industry as a whole and as many individuals as possible to be 'winners'. We will do all we can to defend the sustainability and desirability of sheep farming, as well as support people through the many inevitable changes ahead.

Enjoy this edition of Sheep Farmer. It contains a wealth of technical advice, as well as updates on industry policy, which should go a little way to help you to make sure you and your business are on the winning side.

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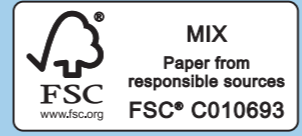
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## NSA regions

### Central



Chairman: **James Bickerton**



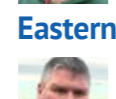
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### Cymru / Wales



Chairman: **Kate Hovers**



Chairman: **Dan Phipps**

### Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**

### Northern Ireland



Chairman: **Jonny Farmer**

### Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**

### South East



Chairman: **Yan Le Du**

### South West



Chairman: **Howard Tratt**

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## New NSA officeholders

The annual round of regional members' meetings has seen NSA regions say farewell and thank you to several long serving officeholders this winter, as well as welcoming others into new roles.

Notable changes see James Bickerton (pictured top left) take the role of NSA Central Region Chairman, and Charles Sercombe (top right) elected as NSA Central Region Trustee. As NSA Eastern Region Trustee Dan Phipps now chairs the Board, the region has elected Andrew Foulds (middle left) to serve as Trustee, and in NSA South East Region Yann Le Du (middle right) will join the Board.

A new Chairman will also lead activity of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale this year, as Graham Jones (bottom) was elected into position at a meeting in March.

More on regional meetings on pages 6-7, and meet James Bickerton on pages 26-27.



## Beltex breeder wins NSA membership

NSA member Anthony Edgley, of Oakhanger Farm in Cheshire, is the lucky winner of a free year's membership following NSA's January prize giveaway. Anthony, who is an established pedigree Beltex breeder, wins free membership for 2021. All new members signing up to NSA, or existing members recommending friends or family, were entered into the prize draw for their chance to win. More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news).

## Ovine semen archive work underway

Back in 2009 NSA and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust took over management of the semen collected by Defra as part of the National Scrapie Plan (NSP), creating the Ovine Semen Archive (OSA).

The archive has been stored since then, but work has now started to collaborate with other species to determine what a national livestock gene bank should look like and be funded. Until OSA is replaced with a more suitable sheep gene bank, the partnership will also streamline its running costs. Work is at an early stage but if you contributed to the NSP, and claimed an owners' share of 10% when the semen was transferred to OSA, you should have recently received a joint letter from NSA and RBST. If you have not received a letter and think you should have done, please email [tomblunt@rbst.org.uk](mailto:tomblunt@rbst.org.uk).

## Sheep Breeders Round Table's conference

The biennial Sheep Breeders Round Table (SBRT) returns in 2021, taking the form of an online conference while Covid-19 restrictions still cause uncertainty surrounding event planning.

Webinars will run online over five days from Monday 15th November 2021. This will not replace the familiar three-day face-to-face conference but act as a 'teaser' event, highlighting the current research around breeding and genetics in the sheep sector and keeping supporters satisfied until the traditional conference can take place in November 2022. More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT).

## NSA membership – not just an event ticket

With flagship NSA sheep events sadly postponed for 2021, now is a good time to make sure you are making the most of your membership – because the valued free-event entry will not be available until larger activities can resume once again.

NSA membership offers more than 10 accessible services or benefits, and also ensures the association can continue its crucial work as the voice of the UK sheep sector during a time of policy change and uncertainty. View a list of membership benefits at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership-with-services](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership-with-services) such as the NSA Lambing list and free legal advice helpline being of immense value to many members.

## Register of sheep advisors prepares to launch

A new Register of Sheep Advisors (RoSA) will be launched at the beginning of June with NSA contributing to its formation and running. Any sheep vets, consultants, RAMAs and others who feel they may benefit from membership of this valuable group can find out more at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-rosa](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-rosa).

## NSA officeholders



**Lord Inglewood**  
Honorary President



**Dan Phipps**  
Chair of the Board



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



**Eddie Eastham**  
UK Policy & Technical Chairman



**Kevin Harrison**  
English Committee Chairman

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## Save the date for NSA AGM

The NSA AGM 2021 will take place on Friday 13th August. Details will be shared with members via Sheep Farmer magazine and the NSA Weekly Email Update.

## New face joins NSA team



NSA was pleased to welcome Sean Riches as its new NSA Policy & Technical Officer at the beginning of March.

Sean joins NSA having previously worked for a large animal health company, so will bring a wealth of experience and expertise in sheep production. Sean joins NSA as maternity cover for Nicola Noble who, with husband Ed and son Arthur, welcomed baby daughter Poppy to the family at the end of March. Congratulations to Nicola and her family – and welcome to the team, Sean.

## Let's stop scab together



NSA has welcomed the launch of a new initiative exploring a structured approach to controlling sheep scab – and looks forward to coordinating the work in South West England.

NSA is one of a number of partners involved in the two-year initiative, funded by Defra via the Rural Development Programme for England and led by Moredun. It is fully supportive of the concept of using on-farm advice, training and testing to drive a coordinated approach to controlling sheep scab in the three focus areas – the North West, Midlands and South West.

With a strong regional presence in the South West, NSA has identified an area suitable to deliver the project aims and, working with people already on the ground, will bring together sheep farmers, their vets and advisors into appropriate clusters. Given its role throughout the UK, NSA is also ideally placed to extrapolate learnings from the projects to elsewhere in the region and throughout England, as well as linking with and comparing to existing initiatives in the devolved UK nations.

The project is not a national eradication programme – but the partnership approach and strong execution means it has the potential to be the benchmark and launch pad for future, larger initiatives. [Email sean@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:sean@nationalsheep.org.uk) to request more information.

## NSA Breed Society Forum goes ahead online

Having been forced to cancel 2020's NSA Breed Society Forum due to Covid-19, this year's online format will provide a long-overdue opportunity for NSA and NSA-affiliated breed societies to exchange information and share updates on their respective activities and priorities.

While attendance has been limited to two people per society in previous years, the online format removes that cap and allows anyone linked to a breed society to attend on Thursday 6th May 2021. [Details at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).

## Thank you to our supporters

Support from the following companies via an annual sponsorship package is invaluable to the work NSA does to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector.

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Rappa  
Red Tractor Assurance  
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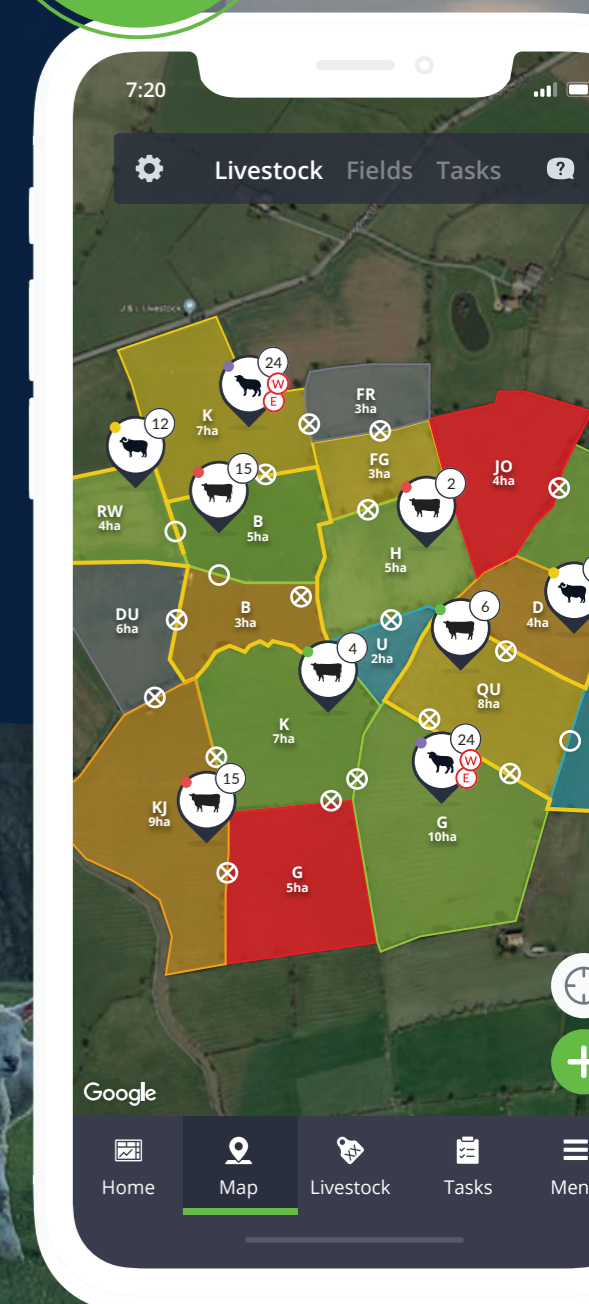


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# NSA regional reports

## NSA South West

By Ian May, Secretary

**The NSA South West Region Annual Members' Meeting in February went well.**

Although we weren't able to make more of an evening of it, as we would've done with an in-person event in previous years, a good number of people joined us online to hear from AHDB Chairman Nicholas Saphir and NSA Policy & Technical Officer Nicola Noble.

Nicholas engaged in a lively discussion around the significant changes currently ongoing within AHDB. While the detail of potential changes can often feel distant from our day-to-day lives, the role of AHDB is significant to us as an industry. And it's important we take the opportunity to engage with the organisation wherever possible to ensure our views are heard.

Nicola provided us with a much-appreciated rundown of the significant amount of work the NSA Head Office team has been doing during what has been a challenging year for several reasons.

Going forward, we are all disappointed not to be holding NSA Sheep South West this year. But, as restrictions allow, we are considering what we may be able to do later in 2021, on a smaller scale, across the region. So please keep an eye out for information as plans become firmer.

## NSA South East

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

**Early February was a busy time for the region with a committee meeting and ARMM held in the same week. Both were held virtually, of course.**

The ARMM was well attended with formal business including the re-election of Chairman Yann Le Du, Vice Chairman Susie Parish and Treasurer John Britton. Andrew Barr was thanked for his sterling work as a trustee for the past six years and was presented with a handcrafted and engraved shepherd's crook as a token of the committee's appreciation. Yann Le Du was nominated to replace Andrew as a trustee.

Guest speaker Matt Smith, Cornish/New Zealander sheep and deer farmer, and world-record-holding shearer, joined the meeting from his kitchen in Cornwall. He addressed the topic of building resilience into farming systems at different levels.

As there was little prospect of holding any events during winter, the region focussed its efforts on a recruitment campaign with an added incentive for new members signing up from the region to be entered into a raffle. Chris Aldridge from Hungerford, Berkshire, was the lucky winner.

Looking ahead, due to the continued uncertainties and restrictions caused by Covid-19, the rescheduled field days, postponed from 2020, will now not take place in June. But we remain hopeful that some may be held in the autumn. Plans are also underway for the regional heats of the Next Generation Shepherd competition, to be held in conjunction with the Southern Shears competition on Saturday 17th July 2021.



Chris Aldridge.

## NSA Cymru/Wales

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

**At the NSA Cymru/Wales Region Annual Members' Meeting, we took the decision to postpone NSA Welsh Sheep until Tuesday 16th May 2023.**

We are grateful to our hosts, the Owen Family from Red House in Aberhafesp, for agreeing the venue. It sounds a long way ahead, but please put the date in your diary now. At the same meeting in February, all officers remained in place with Kate Hovers continuing as Chairman. Kate welcomed NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, Royal Welsh Agricultural Society Chief Executive Steve Hughson, Welsh Government's James Owen, and James Heinrich all the way from New Zealand. Zoom is a useful addition to communication technology! All speakers gave brilliant presentations and a full report can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news).

It was also agreed at the meeting, if regulations permit, we will look at a series of farm walks later in 2021, and we will be running the Next Generation Shepherd competition to find our Welsh competitors for the 2022 final. Watch this space for more details.

## NSA Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

**A small group of NSA Northern Region Committee members met with AHDB Chairman Nicholas Saphir and AHDB Chief Strategy Officer Will Jackson via Zoom in February.**

It was a positive exchange with some encouraging work been reported by both Nicholas and Will. As the new Chairman, Nicholas brings a fresh perspective with emphasis on growing export markets while understanding the food and agricultural sectors. The group reported that they felt there was a change in attitude from the organisation, with a real desire to listen to farmers.



Many NSA regions are hoping to hold NSA Next Generation training and competition days this summer.

## NSA Marches

By Katie James, Secretary

**Since holding our Annual Regional Members' Meeting back in December, it has been a quiet few months for NSA Marches Region with members have focussed on lambing.**

With spring well and truly sprung, the region is looking forward to the easing of Covid-19 restrictions and some face-to-face gatherings as we move into the summer.

A regional committee meeting is planned for April to discuss provisional plans to hold a Next Generation training and competition day in early summer, with hopes a farm walk can also be held later in the season. All members will be welcome to join these events, as well as friends, neighbours and family. Further details of all future events will be listed on NSA's website and shared via the NSA Weekly Email Update and Sheep Farmer magazine.

## NSA Central

By Rose Smyth, Secretary

**The region held its Annual Regional Members' Meeting in February, welcoming James Bickerton as Chairman and Charles Sercombe as Trustee, and thanking the retiring officers David Howlett and Chris Lewis.**

Thank you also to all the other officeholders. Without giving up your time, we wouldn't be able to run.

The meeting included great discussion with two speakers, Mark Simes and Nigel Storer from DLF Seeds and Science. It was good to get together, even if it was online, and we look forward (like everyone else) to when we can meet again in person. The evening was rounded off by a policy update from NSA's Nicola Noble. We had an impressive turn out and look forward to the next meeting.

The next NSA Central Region Committee Meeting will be held on Thursday 6th May and we hope a face-to-face meeting will be able to take place this summer. Details will be announced from May.

See page 2 of this magazine for contact details of regional officeholders, and pages 12 and 13 for policy work by regions representing devolved nations.

## Buy and sell the best at an NSA Ram Sale

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



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

Sheep with performance recording records are available and are clearly identified.

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

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

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

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

### NSA Ram Sales 2021

**NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale** Monday 2nd August – location TBC

**NSA South West Ram Sale** Wednesday 18th August – Exeter Livestock Centre

**NSA Eastern Region Rugby Sale** Friday 27th August – Rugby Farmers Mart

**NSA Eastern Region Melton Sale (TBC)** Friday 17th September – Melton Mowbray Market

**NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale** Monday 20th September – Builth Wells

See page 2 of this magazine for contact details of our Ram Sales Organisers.



It is hoped smaller regional events will be able to take place as the year progresses.

# Variety of topics expands NSA Breakfast Club audience



With face-to-face meetings continuing to be impossible since the New Year, the NSA Breakfast Club is coming into its own and drawing the interest of more members.

The interactive webinar was held weekly in January and February, changing to a regular monthly slot as daylight hours increase and lambing starts. The variety of topics covered means large numbers of members have either attended each webinar, or dipped in and out for different sessions.

The biggest audience was for the regenerative farming versus rewilding debate, which saw Natural England Chairman Tony Jupiter and his Head of Agricultural Policy, Geoff Sansome, take some tricky questions on future plans to tackle climate change and increase wildlife biodiversity.

## Sustainable

Mr Juniper was clear that sheep were integral to sustainable and affordable food production, while delivering ecological and environmental benefits. He suggested farmers had historically had to choose between food or nature, but new policy approaches would bring the two closer together, with a more positive and useful outcome for all.

He mentioned two upcoming areas of work of particular interest – a report detailing the carbon in ecosystems other than woodland or peatland, and a code on white-tailed sea eagles. Natural England's approach to rewilding was on a species-by-species basis, but Mr Juniper accepted comments on the need for consultations to be national, not local, due to how widely apex predators roam.

An advantage of these NSA events taking place online is the ability to involve geographically disparate people. It would have been impossible to otherwise allow farmers from around the UK to access to top level civil servants from Defra, Welsh Government, Scottish Government and LMC.

Each described the plan to phase out direct payments and, instead, inject funds into, as described by Janet Hughes of Defra, 'farmer prosperity, local nature recovery and land use change'.

There was similarity in remit and scope for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, albeit with differences in delivery. But John Kerr said Scottish

Government would stay far more closely aligned to the EU model, while also finding ways to reward food production as a public good in its own right. Nevertheless, ambitious climate change targets would still result in change for farmers, particular in the fight for space for tree planting.

Away from politics, the halal market is one the sheep supply chain cannot afford to overlook, suggested a webinar dedicated to the topic. A predicted 60% of Muslim consumers eating lamb at least once a week, compared to 6% of the rest of the UK population.

## Carcase balance

There is growing demand in domestic and export markets, including regular requests for lean ewe carcasses in the UK, small lamb carcasses on the continent (where the Muslim population is increasing from 4% to 7%), and large lamb carcasses for catering.

There is additional demand at key festivals and the variation in cultures and cuisines between Muslim communities, which means the halal market is far from homogeneous, aids carcass balance, including domestic demand for fifth-quarter products.

Attendees of the gene editing webinar went away with a thorough understanding of the difference between gene editing and gene modification, with the UK Government looking at ways to do more on the former within a post-Brexit approach to genetic science.

A more global view was provided by Marie Prebble and Charlie Beaty, recipients of the NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for NSA Next Generation. They shared their findings from trips to Iceland/Norway (welfare at shearing) and New Zealand (permanent pasture management) respectively.

For details of future NSA Breakfast Club topics, and to watch previous webinars, go to [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars).

## NSA Breakfast Club

An informative and interactive webinar held at 8.30am on the first Wednesday of every month. Don't miss Wednesday 5th May when the topic will be sheep worrying. All sessions are recorded and available to watch back at your leisure.

### Watch again

- Pushing production or prioritising the environment: a debate on balancing the role of permanent pasture.
- Accessing a growing market: a guide to halal sheep meat.
- The return of Dolly? An exploration of sheep gene editing.
- Regenerative farming versus rewilding: a discussion on sheep in the environment.
- A shepherd's overseas adventure: a report from two NSA travel bursary recipients.
- A united approach? A briefing on post-Brexit approaches in the four UK nations.
- Going it alone: a debate on the future trade of UK sheep meat.

White-tailed sea eagles were discussed during the rewilding versus regeneration debate.



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons: Talks Presenters 09



# NSA activity to tackle sheep worrying by dogs

As many members have sadly experienced, or noticed via troubling media coverage, the devastating issue of sheep worrying by dogs appears to have worsened during the past year.

In an effort to raise awareness of the potential devastation attacks can have on flocks, NSA has increased its activity in this area with several more measures planned for the coming months.

To gauge the severity of the current problem, NSA has an online survey running for sheep farmers who have suffered an attack during the past year. NSA urges all members to complete the survey if they have recently, or are currently, experiencing problems with dog attacks on their sheep.

A record-breaking number of respondents have filled out the survey so far. That in itself is an indication of the growing problem, with many shocking experiences shared.

## Results

The launch of results from the survey will mark the beginning of a two-week rigorous campaign, at the end of April and into May, with various online meetings, social media activity and interviews with the media set to take place.

Members will be able to join an NSA Breakfast Club webinar on Wednesday 5th May to discuss the issue, with updates on work to force a change in legislation. Three workshop sessions will also be held during the campaign, providing guidance from rural crime teams and others on how best to deal with cases of sheep worrying. Further details on all events will be shared with members on the NSA website and through the NSA Weekly Email Update.

In addition to this work, NSA has also recently teamed up with the RSPCA in an effort to target dog owners who may be unaware of the potential risk their pets can pose. In a joint press release, RSPCA shared statistics from a 2019 report in

## SHEEP WORRYING BY DOGS CAN COME IN MANY FORMS.



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which, worryingly, 24% of owners reported their dogs had previously chased livestock.

A particular worry for farmers is the increase in dog ownership during the country's recent periods of lockdown and what this might mean as Covid-19 restrictions begin to ease.

## Responsibility

"Sheep farmers across the UK have seen more during the past year, as dog ownership has increased and walking in the countryside has become one of the few activities to be enjoyed," says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. "But dog owners need to be responsible and NSA is committed in its efforts to raise awareness of this."

RSPCA's Dog Welfare Specialist Sam Gaines adds: "There will be lots of dogs this year that, as puppies, were not socialised with other animals due to lockdown. And so their first experience of livestock could be as an adult dog. Owners need to understand they may show a lot of interest and this can be problematic, even if the dog doesn't chase the livestock."

To publicise the issue to members of the public, NSA has produced a range of public-facing posters. These are designed to be displayed at retail outlets, such as pet stores, garden centres and vet practices and point out the risks dogs pose to livestock when running off the lead in the countryside. More than 70 individual stores and retail chains have been contacted by NSA in recent weeks and asked to display the posters. Members can view examples of these at [www.sheepworryingbydogs.org.uk](http://www.sheepworryingbydogs.org.uk)

In addition, NSA has also produced a range of new graphics that have been recently shared successfully on NSA's social media pages. Having received positive feedback, one eye-catching sign has now been made into a downloadable sign for members to download and display if they wish. This is in addition to the usual blue gatepost signs that are available to NSA members.

Complete the NSA sheep worrying survey by Monday 19th April 2021 at [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/sheepworrying2021](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/sheepworrying2021).

Spring brings new beginnings, but what end for the lambs being born this season?

## One-sided arrangements create initial sticking points in EU-UK relationship

Newborn lambs and the arrival of spring signal new beginnings – but is the same true for the wider sheep sector, as we settle into life after Brexit and hope for more normality as Covid-19 restrictions ease?

January-trade data highlights the impact of leaving the EU and the ongoing global pandemic. Exports significantly decreased compared to the same period in 2020, with food and live animal sales into the EU down and the meat sector showing a 59% decrease. In the same period, exports to non-EU destinations also saw a decline of 19%, suggesting factors other than just Brexit.

Tighter domestic supplies, higher lamb prices, lower European foodservice demand and post-Brexit trade friction around shipments into the EU all indicate some decline in UK sheep meat exports. These figures will be watched closely as more data is released.

### Facilities

Export of live lambs and breeding sheep to the EU continues to be on hold due to the absence of seaport facilities to take live animals from a third country. NSA has recently supported an application for border control status at premises near Calais. If successful, it could be operational within the next months and allow export direct to the EU.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, adds: "For imports into the UK, NSA is aware of several plans under discussion, with estimated timelines from July 2021 at the very earliest but most likely early 2022. In the meantime, temporary arrangements

to allow live animals to enter the UK are in place with APHA doing checks at the place of destination – but without this option from the EU, it is a one-sided arrangement."

Through its work with various involved organisations and stakeholders, NSA is keeping this subject high on the agenda for urgent Government and EU Commission attention.

Mr Stocker says: "We are seeing no reciprocal decisions from the EU and it feels as though our negotiating hand is being given away. We are in the ridiculous position of being able to import live breeding animals into the UK, but are unable to export anything due to an absence of facilities."



Movements continue to be a contentious issue.

NSA warns that if the UK loses its ability to move breeding animals across borders, other countries will soon step in.

Further to the response submitted in February to the Defra consultation on animal welfare during transport (see panel), NSA submitted answers in mid-March to questions raised by a UK Parliament Committee call for evidence on moving animals across borders.

Focused on resources, capabilities, disease surveillance and the impact on movements across the Irish border and between Great Britain and the EU/Northern Ireland, it also raised questions on the potential impact of ending live animal

### Animal welfare and transport

As previously covered in this magazine, the Defra consultation on animal welfare in transport presented a number of impractical proposals that appeared to be based on limited evidence – but were in line with the Government's thoughts (and apparent decision) to end long journeys for animals going for slaughter.

NSA's position, as presented in the consultation response, is that suggesting animals should only travel the shortest journey and go to the closest abattoir ignores the reality of economics and supply chains.

Our view considers many of the proposals being poorly made. But, in the spirit of always wanting to see welfare optimised, NSA welcomed more research and offered to work closely with Defra and others on this topic as we move forward.

NSA consultation responses can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work).

exports and the local capacity to slaughter animals that are currently exported.

"There are major concerns for the UK livestock sector around animal movements across its borders. The UK is experiencing greater bureaucracy and excessive paperwork that is increasing costs to the producer and the retailers' shelves, as well as causing delays," comments Mr Stocker. "Issues such as export health certificates, labour and vet shortages, the NI protocol and the lack of suitable border control posts are making life very difficult at this time."

Being an independent trading nation for the first time in more than 40 years should bring opportunities further afield than the EU. However, becoming a trading partner with another country or region in the middle of a global pandemic was never going to be easy.

### Agreements

To support the interests of British farmers, food producers and consumers in future trade agreements, the Trade and Agriculture Commission was established in July 2020 and produced its final report early in March 2021.

Mr Stocker says: "NSA welcomes the report, which summarises findings to which NSA and many other contributed via an evidence survey, round-table discussions and regional events, all held virtually and allowing engagement with people from across the UK and beyond. The reports sets out clear principles to guide the UK Government, along with a series of recommendations on where to take action to focus on long-term gains, not short-term expediency.

"We expect continued discussions and negotiations over the coming months as some of the initial disruption to trade, perhaps in some part due to teething problems, start to be ironed out. There are, however, major concerns for the UK sheep sector around animal movements across its borders that will be a key focus for NSA policy teams in the short to medium term."

For information on GB-to-NI exports, see page 47.

## Shaping the landscape

As the start of the transition away from BPS begins, invitations for expressions of interest have been launched for farmers and land managers in England to shape the new environmental schemes that will replace it.

NSA welcomes the launch of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot, the first element of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), and has been encouraging eligible sheep farmers to sign up. The pilot is an important step in efforts NSA and other organisations have been involved in, working with Defra to develop something that delivers both for farmers and the environment.

Defra has been looking for 'several hundred' farmers from varying farm types and geographical locations across England to take part in the first phase of piloting, to make sure the SFI works in practical terms. This is an opportunity to assess the scheme and potentially to be part of the development (co-design) of a significant and extensive change that can further enhance the role sheep farming plays in our rural landscape.

The deadline for expressions of interest for involvement in SFI has now passed. Successful candidates will be invited to then complete their application and, if eligible, they will enter into agreements from October 2021.

As this is just a pilot, there will be a wider roll out during the next few years, as part of the six to seven year planned transition away from BPS to ELMS.

## Genetics under the microscope

As a result of Brexit, Defra has taken the opportunity to seek views on the regulation of genetic technologies – a consultation to which NSA has responded.

Defra took the view that organisms produced by gene editing (GE) or by other genetic technologies should not be regulated as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) if they could have been produced by traditional breeding methods.

The consultation focused predominantly on the regulation of GE organisms, but also took the opportunity to gather views on the wider regulatory framework governing GMOs. Knowing that GMOs have been widely rejected by the British public, but extensive gene management and manipulation is already happening within agriculture, it was made clear in NSA's response for distinct separation to be made between technologies managing and manipulating naturally occurring genetic variation within a species, and those that introduce alien DNA.

Suggestions for alternative regulatory approaches, a need for UK-wide agreement with the inclusion of the devolved nations, and serious consideration concerning the market acceptability of this technology, both here and in our export destinations, were also included. Additional concerns include the ownership of the technology and its products, and what traits it might be used for.

### Sheep Farmer magazine



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

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### Make your voice heard

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# Future Welsh support must reward both existing and future best practice

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



There was useful engagement and contributions at a recent NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Committee, where much of discussion was devoted to considering the [Agriculture in Wales White Paper](#).

There are areas to be positive about and areas of concern within the paper, which proposes the biggest changes to agricultural policy and support in recent times. NSA has highlighted these and made suggestions in its response to Welsh Government, as well as voicing a wish to be further consulted with in the future.

Welsh Government is proposing to replace BPS and agri-environment with a single direct support scheme – the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme – to reward farmers for environmental outcomes and actions to reduce global warming.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region strongly believes in recognition for the contribution farmers are already making in this area, as well as offering funding for current public goods and future additions and improvements. As Kate Hovers, our regional chairman, has spoken about openly in the press, it is essential the scheme benefits those who have retained and protected habitats. It should not simply incentivise and reward change, but reward those whose change needs to be minimal.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region sent robust feedback on the proposed changes to the welfare and transport regulations (as covered in the previous issue of

Sheep Farmer). Since then, the announcement that took us all by surprise was the proposal to put the whole of Wales in an NVZ. NSA urged members to write to their senedd members to vote against it and I wrote to Minister for Environment Energy and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths, both personally and on behalf of NSA Cymru/Wales Region.

Although these regulations may not affect sheep farmers financially, there will be added paperwork to produce nutrient plans. It does not make sense to add further strain to the industry at a time when we must adjust to new support schemes. I am sure a lot of livestock farmers will be considering their options, but to lose cattle and prioritise sheep is not the way forward when we know mixed grazing is better for the environment.

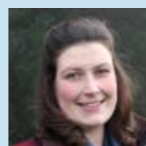
## Scab pilot

APHA's offer of free sheep-scab testing concluded at the end of March. We look forward to the report that will follow, as the work was funded by the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Group, in addition to a small-scale pilot of some novel approaches to sheep scab control and eradication this winter.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region was supportive of the approach to first test new methods on a small scale, including establishment of local eradication groups and use of inspection and blood testing to identify in-contact affected flocks. One of the important steps is finding ways to bring affected and at-risk sheep farmers together to stamp out a local outbreak. So we look forward to hearing how the pilot went and working with a wider roll-out to help eradicate this problem.

# Farmer-led groups to influence policy approach to climate change

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



In the previous edition of *Sheep Farmer*, I wrote about the establishment of the Scottish Government farmer-led groups tasked with finding an industry-wide approach to cutting emissions and tackling climate change.

In late March, the Hill, Upland and Crofting Group (HUCG) published its interim report ahead of the closing session of Scottish Parliament. Detailed proposals and ideas within these reports will now be considered by the Government as it begins its work to create a new rural support scheme for Scotland. Undoubtedly, the future ahead will be challenging in many ways – but has this not always been the case?

At a recent meeting with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing, it was made clear Scotland is a nation that produces high quality food, but that we also have very specific objectives related to the planet while encouraging efficiency and innovation. Food security cannot be taken for granted. It must be sustainable and viable and has to be a continued focus.

Mr Ewing advocated for farmers to step up to the challenge and pave the way for their own future, using the aforementioned farmer-led groups. Mr Ewing also thanked NSA and NSA Scottish Region for its responses to

the recent animal transport consultations, and made it very clear no decisions would be made in Scotland that would make things harder for farmers and crofters. Current standards mandated by law are the highest in the world and will continue to be followed.

Regrettably, many members will not be strangers to sheep worrying incidents and the true extent of the damage caused. In a flurry of activity before the Scottish Parliament recess, NSA Scottish Region eagerly welcomed the passing of Emma Harper MSP's Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

Through the work of industry collaboration and cross-party support, not only does this bill modernise and strengthen legislation regarding attacks on livestock, but it also increases the penalties for livestock worrying up to a fine of £40,000 and 12 months' imprisonment (or both).

This passing of legislation is a step in the right direction for resolution, but is not a quick fix. We need to ensure every case is reported to the police, no matter the severity, and continue to increase positive dialogue with the general public and advocate responsible dog ownership.

Recently updated signs, posters and information are available at [www.sheepworrying.org.uk](http://www.sheepworrying.org.uk). And see more on this topic on page 9.

# 'Lack of urgency' to find post-Brexit solutions for NI sheep movements

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Northern Ireland continues to be in disarray with the unforeseen complications that Brexit has loaded upon it.

The well-used excuse is the Northern Ireland Protocol, but I personally doubt anyone from the UK investigated the likely outcomes of all that was written into the regulations with the EU. Nor are they showing any urgency in finding solutions to the problems that have arisen.

There exist insurmountable obstacles in the way of moving cattle and sheep – yet barriers due to sanitary and phytosanitary rules have been overruled to allow the free flow of foodstuffs to supermarkets and other retailers. And there seems to have been ways to allow frictionless movement of equines.

## Regulations

NSA Northern Ireland Region is involved in various groups fighting on behalf of cattle and sheep breeders affected by the unsustainable regulations on moving livestock from Great Britain to NI. It is extremely difficult to explain the urgency of immediate action to Government representatives. Their interpretation of regulations sometimes

beggars belief. For example, if we had been caught cutting out and replacing tags pre-Brexit we would have faced court action. But since 1st January we have been told it is the law and we must do it for all cattle and sheep imported from GB into NI.

On a brighter note, the continued impact of Covid-19 restriction on at-home lamb consumption means we are still seeing a more acceptable price for lamb. Although the forecast suggests this increase in demand may not continue throughout 2021, an expected small global reduction in production may help keep prices at a sustainable level.

## Exports

As the proportion of old season lamb killed within NI has increased, numbers exported to the Republic of Ireland for slaughter has decreased – from 34,612 in February/March 2020 (49%) to 24,779 (34%) in 2021.

We are awaiting an imminent announcement from Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture Edwin Poots on whether the sheep industry warrants funding from the Covid Compensation Fund for the dramatic fall in wool prices due to the pandemic. NSA, UFU and British Wool have been in talks for some time to explain the wool market situation, reasons for the drop in demand and the fall in prices.



UK eartag numbers are one of many post-Brexit problems.

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# Now is the time to ask levy questions and make sure you have your say

Think hard about what the levy pays for – and who else would provide those services?

Hopefully many of you will have seen the ADHB strategy for the next five years either in the press, on the AHDB website or by attending one of the ‘town hall’ meetings online.

The key pillar of the strategy is to base all the work we do around the reputation of our beef and lamb, for consumer health and British farmers’ care for the environment, to ensure consumers can continue to enjoy British beef and lamb with confidence.

This strategy was developed by the Beef & Lamb Board, with the assistance of major stakeholders including NSA. This was the first time stakeholders were involved from the very beginning of the process.

## Strategy

Part of the strategy is to have a vote every five years on the future of AHDB. There has always been the opportunity to do this if enough levy payers petitioned, as has happened recently in the potato and horticultural sectors.

I believe it is important, before any vote is announced, that we as an industry, decide how we want to vote to ensure the voice of the family farm, dependent on livestock for its income, is clearly heard. So, I have a few questions about our collective priorities that, as an industry, we need to answer – and answer soon.

The vote is open to all livestock keepers in England and to abattoir owners. But there are many questions to address.

In New Zealand, farmers wishing to vote have to pre-register well in advance. Should that be the case here? This allows time for verification of eligibility to vote because AHDB does not have a list of all livestock keepers in England.

## NSA supports sheep sector levy

Prompted by the recent news on various sector levies, NSA invited Adam Quinney to write this opinion piece for Sheep Farmer. He is a beef and sheep farmer from Warwickshire and the current Beef & Lamb Sector Chairman. This contribution is his personal opinion, and chimes with NSA’s position on the beef and lamb levy.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: “NSA is a strong supporter of AHDB Beef & Lamb and would not want to see the end of the statutory levy in the sheep sector. But it is absolutely critical that AHDB listens to and is seen to listen to levy payers.

“Now is the time for a restructure in the governance of AHDB, to ensure the relationship and links between the ‘customer’ and the ‘service provider’ are as closely aligned as possible. When the time comes around for a ballot on the sheep levy, we do not want to see a situation where our investment in our sector is put at risk. We need to take action now to ensure the majority of our levy payers feel they are being listened to and worked for.”

Should there be a minimum number of animals required to be eligible, to exclude pets and pressure groups?

Should there be a weighted vote, and the number of votes capped? Again, in New Zealand, the system allows one vote per 250 sheep and one vote per 50 head of cattle. Should dairy cows be excluded from this vote or included? Should the number of votes an abattoir has be in relation to its yearly kill? Should it be per operating site or in total, and should this also be capped? Should the abattoir vote be completely separate?

Should the vote be a simple yes or no, or should it a series of questions in the ballot, such as a yes or no for export promotion, domestic promotion, market development, knowledge exchange or research and development?

If there was a total no vote, who would do the export promotion work in Europe? Who would run the in-store promotion and trade stands at the major trade shows? Who would organise tours around British farms and abattoirs for officials from around the world, to gain export

licenses? Who would have permanent staff or agents in China, Japan, USA, Canada and Europe, all opening doors to trade and promoting British beef and lamb?

## Campaigns

Who would run campaigns such as the Eat Balanced campaign, which began this year on our TV screens to change people’s attitudes to red meat eating? Who would help fund the provision of educational tools for teachers? Who would provide the majority of funding for Love Lamb Week? Who would carry out consumer research to enable and help promotional advertising, not just by AHDB but also others in the food supply chain? Who else would work in the halal sector, which is so important for sheep sales, to help maintain and improve standards?

All these questions are about areas of work that your levy funds. Of the levy collected, more than 60% is spent on promotion and marketing. This is your organisation, so please get involved in setting out its future.

By Adam Quinney, AHDB Beef & Lamb Chairman

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# Looking back at FMD crisis to strengthen future disease control

By Sean Riches, NSA

Looking forward 20 years seems a very long time, but looking back it seems no time at all.

It doesn't feel like it's 20 years since the UK suffered its last major foot-and-mouth outbreak, in 2001. It's no celebration, rather a remembrance of one of the darkest storms the livestock industry has weathered in recent times.

Much has been written during the past few months about the impact of the outbreak, and it's only right to think back and remember what a devastating period it was – if it serves to make sure the sector keeps its eye on the ball and does whatever it can to avoid another outbreak. And, if such an outbreak should occur, the industry is far better prepared to minimise its impact.

## Failures

One of the big failures of the 2001 outbreak was the inability to trace animal movements quickly. Britain did have foot-and-mouth contingency plans, which at the time were in line with EU requirements. But, by its own admission, Defra's plans (MAFF's at that time) were based only on a relatively small outbreak of cases – 10 infected premises at any one time.

In reality there were 57 infected premises even before the initial diagnosis was made and, from that point on, contingency plans were woefully inadequate. The disease had spread to 48 premises in 15 different counties before there was any suspicion of the disease being in the UK.

The current six-day standstill requirement on beef and sheep farms is a measure introduced to slow the spread of diseases, such as foot-and-mouth, and is a direct result of lessons learned in 2001.

EU Member States are required to run disease outbreak contingency plans twice within a five-year period and in 2018 Defra ran 'Exercise Blackthorn' in conjunction with all devolved administrations. This was an in-depth and extensive exercise, which also had overseas (beyond EU) observation. NSA's Phil Stocker's main recollection of this exercise was the continued inability to trace animal movements. He says: "It appeared everyone involved was taken aback at the gaps remaining after almost a decade of EID in sheep and related movements reporting.

"This realisation was one of a number of factors behind the formation of the Traceability Design Users Group, an industry and Government agency group that came together with significant Defra support, culminating in a significant

investment into the new multi-species Livestock Information Programme and the formation of Livestock Information Ltd – a company owned between AHDB and Defra.

Mr Stocker says: "Disease outbreaks like foot-and-mouth do not respect national boundaries, but animal traceability is a devolved matter and each of our nations has its own movements database and reporting system, linking to a central database to give a UK-wide picture.

"Increasingly it feels as though all our national administrations accept the importance of working together on traceability and movements reporting, and with the significant investment being made in England there appears to be a growing will to ensure compatibility. And there needs to be."

## Protected

There are many different strands of work required to reduce the risks of foot-and-mouth arriving on UK shores again. If, or when, it does re-appear, the livestock sector should be in a better place than it was in 2001. But the sector will also be better protected once a system to support accurate and real-time movements is in place.

"There is an opportunity in England to improve the speed at which some data is captured, and improve the level of detail for individual animals, rather than groups of animals that can mix and change. This can create some uncertainty and slow the speed of response," says Livestock Information Managing Director Simon Hall.

"And thanks to some really great insight from a range of industry stakeholders, including NSA, we have learned the data needed by APHA about animals, keepers and holdings could be used as the foundation for a more data-driven livestock sector, to underpin improvements in productivity, health, product assurance or differentiation.

"As a result, Defra is now investing in a new state-of-the-art multi-species Livestock Information Service in England, and is delivering it through industry collaboration. Our resolute focus is a win-win, where farmers enter better quality, more comprehensive data into the service more quickly because it is easy to do and because it returns a value for them, while delivering world-class traceability for Government."

After the 2001 outbreak, several independent inquiries and reports advised how to improve disease prevention and control measures. Many recommendations, including improved

Have lessons been learnt about biosecurity at borders?

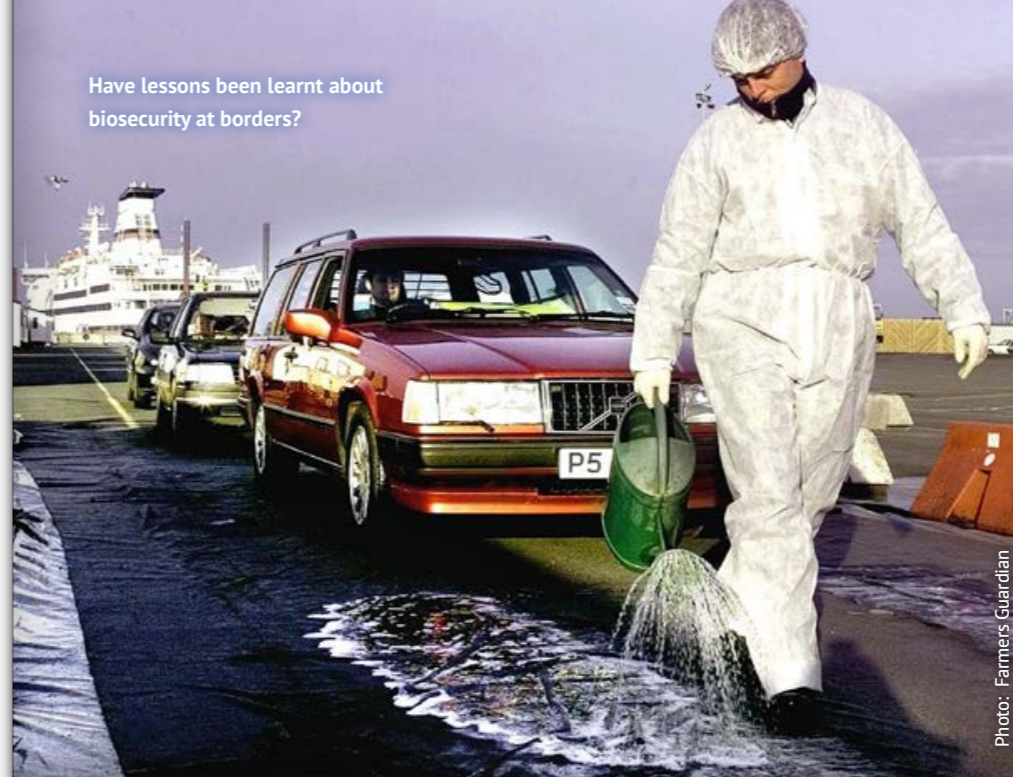


Photo: Farmers Guardian

contingency planning and legislation, timely use of improved communication tools and technology, livestock movement reporting and controls, improved biosecurity, investment in science and greater collaboration with the farming industry, have been implemented. Contingency plans and response procedures are continuously tested, reviewed and refined with lessons learnt from managing outbreaks of exotic diseases and capability exercises.

The National Reference Laboratory for foot-and-mouth, at the Pirbright Institute, coordinates international surveillance via global partnerships. These activities are partly funded by Defra and use viral sequencing technologies to monitor the emergence and spread of new virus lineages in endemic countries. This work provides data that is used to assess the risk to the UK and suitability of existing vaccines.

## Research

Significant funding from Defra has supported a research programme at Pirbright to develop a novel foot-and-mouth vaccine platform, based on virus-like particles. This new vaccine can be produced outside high-containment facilities and is thermostable, allowing it to be stored ready-to-use for future outbreaks in the UK. Further funding by the Wellcome Trust has led to this vaccine being licensed to a major multi-national vaccine company. In addition to prospective use to control outbreaks in the UK, this technology also has application to control the disease in endemic countries, meaning a positive impact on the global burden of disease and reduced risk to the UK.

The Livestock Auctioneers' Association (LAA) says recent experiences during Covid-19, alongside Brexit uncertainty, have clearly

demonstrated how the live-sales system has become more resilient since those dark days during the 2001 outbreak.

"The cloud of coronavirus hung heavily over us 12 months ago, with fears of a complete lockdown of the live-sales ring and mart doors shutting for business, just as was experienced 20 years ago," says LAA Executive Secretary Chris Dodds.

"Instead, our members were able to develop workable programmes to continue trading successfully and, in doing so, setting the industry in good stead for future challenges.

"While not wishing to draw too many parallels to two very different outbreaks, we have learned during the past 12 months that the flexibility and adaptability of the live-sales system has been key."

He adds that the introduction of new strategies and technology, such as real-time online bidding platforms and timed auctions, have an increasingly important role as add-ons to the core business of providing a competitive, transparent sales environment.

"We have shown the trading system can work with only purchasers ringside, with the introduction of drop-and-go. This relies on the trust and transparency the live system engenders, with the auctioneer working for the farmer."

Markets were shut down 20 years ago, with hundreds of thousands of animals slaughtered. Mr Dodds remembers: "Despite the lack of numbers, we still experienced a massive hit as the price of stock collapsed.

"In 2021, despite the dual challenges of Brexit and the global pandemic, we have maintained competitive trade throughout, and this has been reflected in the record numbers and prices.

"This underlines the role of the competitive live system in maintaining trade and prices in

the face of adversity – with biosecurity, animal welfare and safety at the core."

UK sheep meat exports have been recovering since the 2001 outbreak. A reduced national flock means they remain below levels seen before the outbreak, but the UK has worked hard to re-establish itself as a trusted exporter by providing a quality product to foreign buyers.

Volumes exported have remained roughly equal to a third of domestic production. Carcasses remain the largest proportion of UK sheep meat exports. Ovine offal exports increased sharply between 2005 and 2010, partially on the back of improved market access outside the EU, but have stabilised since then.

## Exports

Since 2018, exports have exceeded imports in volume terms. This is predominantly due to declining New Zealand imports and falling domestic consumption. If the trends continue, this position as a net exporter will become the norm.

UK sheep meat is exported to many countries around the globe with non-EU market trade growing 22% in volume terms in 2020, from a relatively low base.

The EU is currently the most important destination for UK sheep meat, accounting for around 90% of exports in 2020. Changes since the UK left the EU customs union have brought problems, which will continue to impact on the price competitiveness of UK product in EU markets and supply chain logistics.

Looking forward, the UK's trading relationship with the EU and other countries around the world is likely to change, with ongoing negotiations taking place.

*Continued overleaf.*

Foot dipping became routine for people working with livestock.



Photo: Farmers Guardian

Another area that has seen a number of changes in the past 20 years, is the relationship between the sheep farmer and the veterinary profession. Prior to 2001, sheep farmers would have used vets mainly for emergencies – few would have had a vet on the farm on a routine basis. And sheep work was often not financially attractive to vet practices, particularly when compared to the regular income offered by, for example, the dairy sector.

Foot-and-mouth resulted in a change to the vet/sheep farmer relationship. With restrictions on livestock movements, farms became isolated. There are interesting parallels between foot-and-mouth and Covid-19. The former saw the countryside locked down and the latter sees people in lockdown.

But in 2001 the vet often became a vital source of information, bringing understanding and a sensitivity to the practical requirements and also helping farmers cope with the unprecedented and difficult situation they faced. The importance of good communications became more evident, making sure farmers and communities knew what was being done and specifically why it was being done.

Post foot-and-mouth, the improved farmer/vet relationship reverted over time and research has highlighted the relationship is, again,

predominantly based on emergency need. But this work did prove to be something of a watershed and vet practices started to pay more attention to the needs of sheep farmers.

Further research, led by Nottingham University, identified various challenges and barriers that have affected relationships between UK sheep farmers and vets. In response to these findings, flock health clubs were developed to facilitate improved and cost-effective sheep farmer and vet interaction. Such clubs show tangible improvements in both farmer and vet relationships and measures of flock health and welfare.

## Knowledge

As more vet practices develop and offer opportunities for sharing knowledge, not only from the local practice and industry experts but also from other farmers, it can only stand the industry in good stead for the future.

The worst thing the industry could do is be complacent or over-confident – it is not yet in a position to say this is all in place. But with extensive knowledge of the impact a disease outbreak like this can have on trade, costs, and industry reputation, the imminent improvements in animal traceability, our enhanced surveillance ability, developments in

vaccine capability, closer relationships between vets and sheep farmers, recent supply chain and live-auction learnings – and the industry's ability to communicate quickly and work collaboratively – must come together to put us in a better place than we were.



Wheel spraying was another measure taken to stop the spread of FMD.

Photo: Farmers Guardian

# Rutland Flock hits new heights of lamb performance

**For Percy Gilman and his Head Shepherd Zak Johnston, high output is a top priority for their flock of 4,000 North Country Mule ewes and rapid lamb growth rates coupled with fast finishing are key elements to success.**

'The flock is based on unploughable permanent pasture so to keep flock numbers up we creep feed our lambs to get them away before the grass burns off over the summer' says Percy. 'But creep is expensive, so to make sure we use it efficiently our lambs have to grow fast and finish quickly'. Every extra week it takes to finish costs us over £2/lamb in extra feed and because the market price is normally falling, we can easily be looking at losing a total of £10/lamb' says Percy.

The need for high growth rates has led this farm to look carefully at the potential of the rams they use. 'The pedigree rams we were buying were not lasting long enough and their lambs lacked in 'get up and go', so 12 years ago we started using some crossbred (Texel x Suffolk rams) and liked what we saw' says Percy. 'The Suffolk gave us fast growth and the Texel shape, but we wanted to select the fastest growing rams and with no breeders recording crossbreds, I thought why not try breeding and performance recording our own?'

So, they bought 42 Suffolk ewes with high EBVs and a very high EBV Texel ram to put on them and set about breeding their own. 'The results have been even better than we hoped, says Percy 'We are getting phenomenal growth, which not only gets lambs away fast, but carcase weights average over 20kgs and because we also select Texels for leanness, our creep fed lambs are still lean even up to 22kgs. The rams also maintain good condition through tupping and are lasting' he adds.

Signet are now fully recording these crossbred rams and they can be compared with recorded Suffolks across the country. This shows they are at the top of the Suffolk EBV's in the Signet

## Farm facts:

- 4,000 North Country Mule ewes to Tex x Suffolk rams
- Lambing from 3rd week February with >200% scanning and 1.7 lambs reared /ewe
- Ewes are wintered on sugar beet tops and forage rape and only yarded for lambing. Supplemented with high quality compound until enough grass available.
- Lambs are creep fed, starting with a bought in creep and then a home-mix based on cereals, beans and malt culms for fibre.
- Target is to have 70% of lambs finished by the second week of July and 100% by the end of August. In 2020, 75% of nearly 7,000 lambs were sold by mid-July.
- Carcase weights average >20kgs and 96% are EUR classification; <5% overfat.
- Replacements are bought direct off farms as ewe lambs and run on a separate holding until the following autumn to minimise disease risks.



recording scheme and the flock are now only retaining the top 1% ewe and ram lambs. The way Percy has planned and executed his composite breeding programme is to be applauded' says Sam Boon of Signet. 'Within just five years of selecting the best possible genetics we can measure the benefits, with the genetic potential for growth increasing by 500g/year and a higher carcase yield, while still retaining the advantages of improved vigour' Sam adds.

The start the lambs get is also critical according to Zak 'Lambing starts on 20th February and our ewes have to work hard in the first month' he says. 'We keep costs down by grazing most ewes on sugar beet tops and forage rape over winter, before they are yarded for lambing. We keep a very careful eye on body condition and feed a high-quality supplement to make sure they lamb down with plenty of milk. When scanning over 200% the majority of our lambs are reared as twins on creep feed, so we must make sure that nothing holds them back' he adds.

Worm and blowfly control are two other key threats that have to be controlled carefully according to Zak. 'We try to time our first white drench for Nematodirus according to the SCOPS forecast and advice, we then worm as necessary. Neither can we afford to let blowfly set lambs back. We now use CLiK™ EXTRA on our lambs and have learned that getting the product on ahead of the fly season, when we can take the time to get accurate application on every lamb, gives us the expected duration of protection. Elanco have also let us try a 'Power Doser' applicator which makes it much easier to get consistently accurate application, which is a real challenge when you have so many lambs to treat!'



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## Young shepherds prepare for competition



The NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year competition was disappointingly halted in 2020 due to Covid-19, but the search for a winner has started again.

Having qualified for contest finals, which should have been held at NSA Sheep Event in summer 2020, 12 skilled young shepherds are now preparing for a series of virtual tasks as the competition resumes.

Competitors have already completed a carcass judging competition, their observations impressing judge Steve Powdrill of AHDB. "Judging carcasses by the use of photographs is never easy due to lighting, angles and sizing," he says. "So it was wonderful to see the have-a-go attitude by all competitors. The task asked competitors to classify eight carcasses using the EUROP grid, giving reasons as to why each carcass was scored as it was.

### Encouraging

"There was some high scoring on the classification and good descriptions with excellent in-depth commentary around conformation and fat. What was also encouraging to see was how some had mentally broken the carcasses down, then visually applied and named a market outlet for each."

The next challenge for finalists will be a demonstration of their ATV handling skills and worm drenching knowledge and technique. Other competition elements are also likely to be completed online. But hope remains that a face-to-face gathering of competitors will be possible, to conclude the climax of the contest later this year.

Meet the finalists on pages 22-23.

## Proud to support NSA and the next generation of sheep farmers



The Texel Sheep Society has supported NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions – regional heats and the national final – for many years.

The society says it values the opportunity to support the next generation of commercial sheep farmers and help develop their skills – and that supporting the NSA competitions is just one of a number of activities it undertakes in this area.

John Yates, Texel Society Chief Executive, says: "There is no doubt that, with a changing focus in agricultural support across the UK, the sheep industry is facing challenging times.

"Attracting the best and brightest young minds into any industry is key to success. The sheep sector has plenty of enthusiastic young entrants, but they need every opportunity made available to them to succeed. This is vital if the UK is to remain a competitive player in the world sheep market."

Texel Society Youth Development Coordinator Ailish Ross adds it is important for young people to recognise there is a wide range of potential careers in the sheep sector, including those in a number of allied industries such as the veterinary, feed, advisory, processing and retail.

"You don't have to be a farmer to play a pivotal role in the sheep industry and there is a wealth of opportunities for young people, no matter what their background or skill set.



## Programme continues online during lockdown

Covid-19 lockdown has prevented any face-to-face Next Generation events so far this year, so a series of online activities have taken place to keep younger sheep farmers interested and motivated in NSA's Next Generation programme.

The group of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors met online in January to catch up and share updates on their own recent activity since they previously met online, in the autumn 2020. The group was joined by NSA English Committee Chairman Kevin Harrison, who the group enjoyed meeting at their one-and-only in-person session of 2020, for a quick lambing refresher poll and discussion.

Members can read the latest updates from the NSA Ambassadors at [www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk](http://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk).

Back in February, NSA travel bursary award recipients Charlie Beaty and Marie Prebble led an interesting webinar on their travel adventures. This is available to view again for those interested to hear about their time in New Zealand, Norway and Iceland.

View the webinars at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars)

"Many who have competed in NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions in previous years are now a key part of successful businesses, filling a wide range of essential roles within the industry. The Texel Sheep Society Youth Development programme is pleased to have played a role in helping to support NSA in developing these people's skills and confidence for the benefit of both themselves and the wider sheep industry," adds Miss Ross.

### Technology

She says the increasing use of technology in the sector also means the skills needed are rapidly changing. "Staying up to date with the latest technology and trends in the sheep sector is vital for future success."

Mr Yates continues: "NSA Sheep Events have traditionally played a key role in disseminating the latest information to sheep producers across the UK. With the loss of these events during the past 12 months, it has been encouraging to see young people engaging with virtual events including the successful NSA Breakfast Club meetings.

"While these can't replace the social aspect offered by live events, they still provide valuable learning and networking opportunities."

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# Young Shepherd finalists



Meet the finalists who will be competing for a share of the £2,000 prize pot, courtesy of sponsorship from the Texel Sheep Society, and find out more about their sheep farming experiences.

## Representing NSA Marches Region

### Tom Garlick Herefordshire



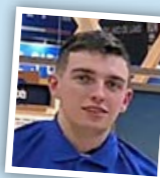
I'm 19 and work on our family's farm near Hereford. I'm a member of my local young farmers club, Welsh Newton YFC, where I currently hold the role of Vice Chairman. I have participated in ploughing and machinery matches, as well as competing in stockjudging at both county and national level.

Our family partnership manages around 1,500 acres (600ha) and comprises beef, sheep, arable and contracting enterprises. I reintroduced sheep to the farm in 2012, building up to today's flock of 1,100 ewes. We also fatten around 1,500 store lambs and grazing ewes through the winter months. I am predominantly responsible for the sheep enterprise.

We run a Texel cross Mule flock, with ewes lambing indoors from the beginning of February, and any late lambers and ewe lambs lambing in April. All ewes are tugged to Texel or Texel cross Berrichon rams, with ewe lambs being served by pure Berrichon rams. Our lambs are fattened on creep feed and we aim to have the majority sold by the end of September. Any remaining homebred lambs are run alongside the purchased store lambs during the autumn.

## Representing NSA Cymru / Wales Region

### Daniel Llyr Williams Anglesey



I'm 18 and live on our fourth generation family-run farm at Ysgelloog in North Wales. We farm around 500 acres (200ha) of lowland, with 110 suckler cows and more than 1,000 Suffolk and Texel cross breeding ewes. We also keep 50 pure Texels and 40 pure Suffolk ewes. Most of our lambs are sold deadweight, with around 40 Texel and Suffolk yearling and ram lambs sold to other farms each year.

I mainly work on our family farm, but I also work on two dairy farms – milking more than 750 cows managed on New Zealand spring calving systems. During the summer I carry out shearing work with two other people and we have a round of about 30,000 sheep across Anglesey.

Before I started work I studied agricultural level 3 at Glynllifon College. While there I took part in Wales' 2019 NSA Next Generation shepherd competition. I was placed second, aged 17, in the under-21 and under-26 categories.

I hope to eventually take over the family farm from my parents. I want to continue expanding but also hope to travel during the next few years, including a few shearing seasons in New Zealand.

## Representing NSA Central Region

### Harry Lyons Cheshire



I'm 19 and a student at Reaseheath College, studying for a Level 3 extended diploma in agriculture. From a non-farming background, I've been interested in farming since the age of four when my uncle bought me two sheep. From this small beginning I have built up a flock of 120 head, which I run on approximately 100 acres (40ha) of rented ground. I am also able to produce hay and haylage for my own use and for sale.

The flock comprises pedigree Suffolks, with some Suffolk cross ewes. My main interest is pedigree Suffolk breeding and I try to improve my flock every year by selectively buying in new breeding stock.

As well as running my own flock and studying to complete my college course, I also work for a well-known Suffolk breeder. And I have recently been given the opportunity to take over the management of a small farm, which I have restocked with North Country Cheviot ewes in order to breed MV-accredited Scotch Halfbreds and Suffolk cross Scotch Halfbreds, which I aim to sell to other pedigree flocks for use as embryo recipients.

### Jack Charleton Derbyshire



Having grown up on a large sheep and beef farm in Northumberland, I've been set on farming since an early age. In 2016 I graduated from Harper Adams University with a degree in agriculture and carried out a placement on a mixed arable and livestock farm in Sussex. I then travelled to New Zealand and Australia that winter.

I worked on my family farm when I came home, before securing a job as a Trainee Farm Manager at Chatsworth Estate, Derbyshire. During the past two years I have learnt and experienced all types of practical, theory and management tasks involved in running a large estate farm.

In June 2020 I was promoted to Assistant Farm Manager, which means more responsibility and is both challenging and enjoyable.

I became an NSA Next Generation Ambassador in early 2020, attending one gathering before lockdown. It was interesting to meet the other ambassadors and visit other sheep farms, and I look forward to meeting up with the rest of the team soon and resuming the ambassador programme.

### Tomos Davies Denbighshire



I live on my family's farm, Y Lon near Prion, in Denbigh in the beautiful Vale of Clwyd. We have a mixed livestock farm, with a flock comprising crossbred ewes and a small flock of purebred Lleyen sheep. All ewes are crossed with Texel rams to produce butchers' lambs with some Lleyen cross Texel replacements retained for the crossbred flock.

I left school to study BTEC level 3 in engineering at Glynllifon College, near Caernarfon. NSA Welsh Sheep 2019 was held at the college, offering the opportunity to compete in the college's young shepherd team. I was winner in the under-21 section and went on to compete for my country in the European Young Shepherd event, in Paris, in February 2020. I was placed sixth.

I have set up a contract shearing business with my brother, using a shearing trailer that I designed and built at college as part of my engineering course, and together we shear 15,000 local ewes.

In December 2019 I went shearing in New Zealand for two months. This was a fantastic experience, which improved my shearing tally and technique. It was also an opportunity to see how the Kiwis farm and tour the beautiful country.

## Representing NSA Scottish Region

### Farquahar Renwick Ross-shire



I'm from Lochbroom in North West Scotland, where our family's farm is home to a flock of North Country Cheviots and Luing cattle. My family has a rich history of farming and I'm proud to be part of that. I was honoured to be asked to represent Scotland in this competition and I'm looking forward to it.

I've represented Scotland before – twice at the International Young Shepherd competitions in Paris and once at the international sheepdog trials. Running this competition during difficult times is a great idea. The format will be totally different to events held previously, but I'm looking forward to getting involved.

## Representing NSA Northern Region

### Matthew Fearon Cumbria



I am 21 and currently working as a contract shepherd. I was lucky enough to be born into farming, on a hill farm in the Borrowdale Valley in Cumbria, where I developed my passion for Lake District hill farms, Herdwick sheep and traditional shepherding.

As a contract shepherd I am now running a hill farm in the Lakes carrying two flocks of Herdwick ewes in the Thirlmere Valley. I've been here almost a year; it's provided a great opportunity for me to get into farming. Before this I was self-employed, working on two other hill farms and helping on our family farm.

My three Border Collies play are crucial to my work. But I also enjoy competing with them, in my spare time, in open and nursery trials.

## Representing NSA Eastern Region

### Tom Martin Norfolk



I'm 21 and from Hilgay in West Norfolk. I grew up on my family's farm and have had a keen interest in farming from a young age. I'm a self-employed shepherd, working several different farms during the year, and also undertaking harvest work.

I have a flock of pedigree Texels, which I run with my younger brother. The flock was established in 2013 when we were gifted in-lamb ewes for Christmas. Our main goal is to breed strong shearling tups for the commercial market. We sell our rams mainly from home and at NSA ram sales.

During the past year I have learnt to shear and I'm looking forward to the coming season where I hope to develop my skills.

## Representing NSA South West Region

### Adam Garthwaite Devon



I'm 27 years old and originally from County Durham, but I now live in Devon. I'm predominantly a beef and sheep farmer, but also a contract shearer and do livestock husbandry work for other farmers in the area. I also turn my hand to small-scale fabrication in the manufacture of sheep and cattle feeders and handling systems.

We run a pedigree Limousin herd, producing breeding bulls for commercial and pedigree suckler herds, as well as Swaledale and Bluefaced Leicester sheep flock. We have both pedigree and commercial Swaledale ewes, some going pure annually to breed replacements, and others crossed with the modern-type Bluefaced Leicester. We have a small pedigree Bluefaced Leicester flock to breed our own tups, others we sell as breeders, mainly at market.

## Amy-Jo Reid Aberdeenshire



I live and work in Scotland's Moray and Grampian areas. I contract shepherd 600 organic Lleyen, Texel and Romney cross ewes for the Drummur Estate, producing prime organic lamb direct to the abattoir and homebred replacement females, selected on performance and maternal data.

I also own 250 commercial North Country Cheviot ewes and 20 pedigree Texels and run 200 Mule and Cheviot Mule hogs annually, all on seasonal lets. All other lambs are finished off grass or forage crops direct to the abattoir, and maiden gimmers are sold at our local market. I started ultrasound scanning through the winter months, as well as hill gathering, and work to help other farmers and shepherds through the busier summer months. I also train and work Border Collie sheepdogs. As well as qualifying for this competition, I am an NSA Next Generation Ambassador.

## Representing NSA Northern Ireland Region

### Alexander Boyd County Antrim



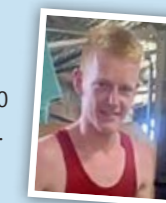
I'm 21 and I farm on my family's beef-and-sheep farm just outside Straid, County Antrim. We farm 300 acres (120ha) and keep 110 Saler suckler cows and 330 Texel cross, Mule and Easy Care ewes.

I completed a level 3 extended diploma in agriculture at CAFRE's Greenmount Campus in June 2019. I worked on a large hill farm in Newton Stewart, Scotland, during my placement year. The farm is 5,500 acres (2,225ha) and runs 400 Saler suckler cows and 1,600 ewes, comprising 900 Lleyens and 700 south type Scottish Blackface ewes.

In October 2019, I went to New Zealand and worked for an agricultural contractor. It was a fantastic experience and I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it. I now work at home alongside my father and also work with my cousin in his cow foot trimming business.

I'm a member of Straid YFC and enjoy taking part in club competitions, such as stockjudging and public speaking.

### Ryan Adams County Antrim



I farm part time at home with my father. We have a small farm where we keep 150 commercial Suffolk and Texel cross ewes. I also have a flock of 30 Perth Scottish Blackface ewes. We have a poultry house where we rear turkeys for a local company. And we also rear dairy-bred calves and currently have 90 head.

My two cousins and I have a sheep shearing run, shearing around 18,000 sheep from mid-May through to early July. Throughout the shearing season we also compete in several shearing competitions across the UK.

In 2020 I travelled to New Zealand, shearing for a contractor in Napier, North Island. My aim was to shear 300 sheep in a day. I completed that goal before Christmas and then went on to shear 401 in an eight-hour day in early 2021.

I am also a self-employed joiner and a member of Coleraine Young Farmers, where I am currently club leader.

# Agri-environment attitudes vary between generations

With increased environmental requirements on the cards for future agricultural support schemes, here two North Yorkshire sheep farmers from different generations explain their existing experiences on entering stewardship-type agreements.

At 27 years old, Catherine Sanderson has only ever known decoupled farm payments linked to public goods. On her 24ha farm plus rented grazing, near Thirsk, she says she is a 'big believer' that sheep and the environment can go hand in hand. The farm runs 225 breeding females and has long been part of stewardship schemes, as well as various North York Moors National Park projects.

Catherine says: "Stewardship has always been part of the mix for me. I don't see it as a big choice to make, as I've only known farming with the environment at the forefront of everything we do.

"We have chosen what suits our system or things we have been interested in trying

anyway. One of the best options in the mid-tier scheme has been the legume and herb-rich sward, as it's given us the confidence to try with drought-resistant species. Climate change means dry spells are more frequent, so this should help with long-term sustainability. And if it provides more habitat for pollinators, everyone's a winner."

## Research

The determining factor, she says, is in the research needed before starting a scheme. She adds: "Knowing exactly what you are signing up to is crucial, to avoid unexpected restrictions where you should have complete management. If a scheme was too restrictive for the money being offered, we would look at different options. I consider us to be lucky to be farming in a national park, as it gives us access to different schemes.



I've only known farming with the environment at the forefront of everything we do.



Catherine Sanderson



"Looking ahead, we'll certainly remain involved in environmental stewardship. I've considered the ELMS pilot scheme and, if the final scheme is similar, I can see us getting involved. As a very small farm, we need to maximise our financial output from every acre and I can definitely see ELMS playing a part in that. My only hope is that it will be fairer in rewarding farmers than current schemes."

With a similar allegiance to nature, but perhaps different incentives for making changes, Neil Heseltine, from Malham, is well known for his environmental approach to farming.

He has spent the past decade embracing stewardship schemes and making subsequent changes that have brought both financial and environmental gains to his farm.

Neil explains: "In 2012 I had a choice to make, for financial reasons and for the sake of my family and mental health – either become a different kind of farmer or pack it in. The family has remained in farming, happily and profitably, and we have the time, energy and money to devote to other people and activities that are important to us.

"We now have a lot fewer sheep. Many farmers might view that as a failure, but that's not our experience. The more sheep we had, the harder we worked and the more money we had to invest each year. Cutting our stock in half improved profits by cutting the amount

of feed and supplements we had to buy in. It also meant the fields weren't over-grazed and we were able to encourage wildlife and biodiversity."

Taking advantage of environmental schemes was slightly secondary in Neil's decision-making process, but fits perfectly with his ethos.

## Decisions

"Our approach also means I'm not tied to the farm," says Neil. "I have more family time and have pursued other interests, including becoming Yorkshire Dales National Park Chairman. A similar decision might not suit everyone, but I believe it can help small farmers like us to remain on the land and keep rural communities alive.

"I encourage young people to look at the environmental schemes on offer and see how they can fit with their business, and to not be



I hope the next generation will be able to adapt their businesses to fit with future schemes with less resistance.



Neil Heseltine



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# Next generation 'central' to all activity for new NSA regional chairman

By Katie James, NSA

It's not difficult to sense the enthusiasm new NSA Central Region Chairman James Bickerton has for the country's future sheep farmers.

From his job as Course Manager and Lecturer at Reaseheath College in Cheshire, through to helping run the NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year competition, it's clear he is passionate in helping younger sheep farmers take their first successful step onto the industry ladder.

Having grown up on his family's mixed livestock and arable farm, just 11 miles from the college where he himself studied and now works, James is well placed to nurture the country's future shepherds.

"As an 18-year-old student, I'd never have believed I'd be here now teaching," he says. "But, as I always say to students, you can't predict your future, so accept the opportunities that come your way and just run with them."

## Career

The family diary farm could not sustain multiple families so, after 30 years working there, James took a different career path. His brother Andrew manages the day-to-day running of the herd. "It is now the college – its farm and its students – that take up my time," he says.

James has worked at Reaseheath College for the past 13 years, where he oversees a group of

third year level 3 extended diploma agriculture students who have chosen to specialise in beef and sheep management. It is an increasingly popular course for farmers' sons and daughters, as well as a growing number of students from a non-farming background. And, in an area famed for its dairy production, the fact that approximately 40% of agriculture students choose to specialise in beef and sheep production is encouraging.

More than 200 further education (FE) students study a level two or three course in agriculture or an apprenticeship at the college each year with a good number also progressing to higher education (50% of students in 2020/21). Many also complete an extended period of industrial experience as part of their studies and this is something James feels is crucial to their future careers.

"Reaseheath is one of the few FE colleges in the country offering a middle-year sandwich placement for level three students. This is so valuable, the students gain a lot from it. They return more mature, more questioning and full of ideas and confidence. It's great to see," he says.

Of course, industrial experience is also gained through work on the 618-acre (250ha) college farm, overseen by farm manager Ed Parrish.

Home to a dairy herd of 250 milkers and a sheep flock of 450 North Country Mules, Welsh Mules and homebred Mule replacements, the farm has a crucial role in providing students with regular practical farm experience.



James Bickerton.

The farm also has a role in educating the public, with annual lambing weekends traditionally attracting up to 10,000 visitors each March. An event that was sadly cancelled this year due to Covid-19, James says: "It was such a shame not to have the open lambing weekends this year. But, to ensure the public could still 'access' the lambing shed, the college made a series of online videos, mostly aimed at KS2 and KS3 school pupils. These went down very well."

To ensure the public has a good experience in normal years, all ewes are synchronised providing an influx of lambs during the two weekends – a practice that has proved successful.

"Ewes scanned at 211% this year, with 80% holding to first service. We are quite pleased although, in truth, I prefer a scanning percentage closer to 200%. A high scanning percentage is nothing to boast about, I find, and we all know the associated problems it can bring," he says.

## Measuring

But the higher number of cade lambs this year has presented no issue as the farm is involved in a commercial trial measuring weekly lamb weights and milk powder use against daily liveweight gain. "Results from this have, so far, been outstanding. We have several lambs growing at rates of in excess of 600g/day," says James.

All ewes are lambed indoors, under the supervision of farm shepherd Anthony Baggaley, and are moved into the lambing sheds six weeks prior to lambing. Here they are fed a TMR. James is a big advocate of this feeding system, offered during a 48-hour period. "If you are able to, I'd highly recommend feeding TMR. Ewe intakes are good and when we feed them we don't see rushing and crushing at troughs."

## Farm facts

- Reaseheath College Farm supports the theory and practical education of more than 200 FE and HE students at its site near Nantwich, Cheshire.
- James has worked as lecturer and course manager at the college for the past 13 years.
- The farm covers 618 acres (250ha) with a progressive dairy unit milking 250 pedigree Holstein dairy cows, a sheep enterprise of 400 North Country Mule ewes and a new small beef unit to finish cattle from the dairy unit or sell as stores.
- Technology is key on farm with all data recorded for student and industrial analysis.

The farm has altered its ration this year and, for the first time, has included maize silage. "We had to adjust the ration as most of the grass silage in the clamp, destined for the dairy herd, has red clover in it. The farm grows 173 acres (70ha) of it, in a mixture with Italian rye grass. But with the associated problems for ewes we cannot include it in the ration, so we have added maize silage to the mix. The ewes are doing well on it, with intakes of 4-5kg/ewe at peak times."

Being 'data driven', the college farm chose to use EBV scored Abermax and Primera tups for the first time this year across the whole of the flock to provide some further figures for analysis. The move away from the farm's traditional choices of Suffolk, Texel or Charollais tups seems, so far, to have been a success.

"We have noticed a significant improvement in lambing ease and lamb vigour this year, so we will definitely use these genetics again. But, going forward, as a method of providing a variety of data for students to look at and learn from, I think the wider range of tups will be used again."

Ewes and lambs are moved outside as soon as possible and creep fed, for as long as the weather and grass growth dictates, with performance figures regularly recorded. Finished lambs are sold through local markets with a number retained for use in the college catering facilities.

Routine health care includes clostridial and pasturella vaccines, anti-abortion vaccines for all bought-in replacement ewes, and an anti-



The unit is usually open to visiting public during lambing time.

lameness vaccine. "The footrot vaccine has been so beneficial for the farm. We had a significant lameness issue, but now just 2% of the flock is affected," says James.

Looking forward, the college farm is hoping to further embrace mechanisation and technology to demonstrate its increasing importance to the farming sector. Having already installed robotic milkers to run alongside the traditional milking parlour, the farm's sheep enterprise hopes to follow in the footsteps of the dairy unit.

"Our students need to experience farms that are pushing forward and adapting. Through visiting modern, ambitious farms and completing college stock duties, using the latest technology, they are well placed for their future farming careers."

## Encouraging

And, as students move on, James is encouraging those who choose to compete in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions. This is a contest he has been involved with for a number of years in several NSA regions, as well as the biennial final held at the NSA Sheep Event. "It's been great to watch these young competitors demonstrate their shepherding skills and passion for the industry," he comments.

Having been recently elected Chairman of NSA Central Region, James is hoping he can use his time in office to increase uptake of membership by younger farmers in the region. "I'm meeting more young shepherds than most, but convincing them to sign up for NSA membership can be difficult. I am hoping I can work to remove some of the barriers that are stopping them," he says.

"NSA does a great job with the Next Generation programme, but as a wider industry we must do

more to support the younger generation and I think that needs to start on the family farm.

"Agriculture has a problem with succession. Generation after generation makes the same mistake of not allowing younger family members the opportunity to take some level of responsibility early enough in their career – while they are still enthusiastic and full of ideas.

"There is so much pleasure to be gained from nurturing and watching the next generation succeed. I'd encourage all farmers to just give them the chance to try."

James oversees students who have chosen to specialise in sheep production.



Cade lambs taking part in a commercial trial, measuring milk powder use against daily liveweight gain.

“

We must do more to support younger generations and I think that needs to start on the family farm.

James Bickerton

”

# Marketing round up

Here NSA invites the levy and marketing boards to update on efforts to sell sheep meat and wool.

## Good honest food – LMC shares the facts



The sensitivity of consumers to topical issues means LMC is continuing to tell the truth about lamb and beef.

LMC successfully launched the 'Good Honest Food' campaign in October 2020, not only to showcase the world-class beef and lamb produced in Northern Ireland but also with the aim to proactively address consumer concerns surrounding the environment, health and provenance.

"Consumer research highlighted the areas where consumer behaviour was changing and the potential reasoning behind an increase in the numbers of consumers planning to reduce meat intake in the future," says LMC's Lauren Patterson. "The campaign was designed to provide scientific information about the industry from independent experts, and to support consumers in making informed decisions about their diets."

"The campaign is currently in its second burst, with initial feedback proving extremely positive from both consumers and those within the industry. Consumer behaviour has been markedly influenced by circumstances during the past 12 months and they have perhaps never been closer to their food in terms of origin, quality and the sustainability credentials of local produce."

LMC has been successfully promoting lamb during 2020, through its ongoing marketing campaign, outdoor sampling and via LMC's school cookery demonstrations, which took place between lockdowns.

"And we are working on new lamb creative materials, which will be launched during the next few weeks," adds Mrs Patterson. "These assets will include a new recipe book, designed by chef James Devine (pictured), as well as outdoor posters, videos for social media and a series of infographics to be used online."

She adds that LMC is using more digital technology to reach a new consumer cohort less exposed to conventional advertising methods. "Many consumers are accessing our website and media channels for information. It's a great platform and we're confident we will keep improving on previous results, with even more consumers enjoying the sensory experience of eating our world-class lamb and beef."



## QMS 'gets active' with spring advertising campaign



Health and wellbeing continues to be at the core of the next QMS advertising campaign, as it collaborates with outdoors influencers and celebrates easy, nutritious cooking at home.

In its spring 2021 campaign, QMS is building on 2020's 'Make It' activity, to inspire consumers to eat red meat as part of a healthy balanced diet, whether cooking at home, eating al fresco or fuelling an active lifestyle.

Starting at the end of March, and set to reach 69% of all adults in Scotland, the six-week campaign will feature billboards outside Tesco, Asda and Coop stores, as well as advertising on TV, podcasts and across social media.

"Eating for health and wellbeing has become a top priority for consumers during the past 12 months and, with food service remaining largely closed during the next few weeks, most will still be cooking every meal at home," says QMS's Lesley Cameron.

"The focus of our spring campaign is to continue to inspire consumers to choose Scotch Lamb PGI when cooking for themselves and to instil this as a habit."

QMS will be expanding on the increased appreciation of red meat seen in steady sales growth during the past 12 months, with recent data showing a 30% increase in unprocessed red meat sales value in Scotland in January.

"Across all social channels, QMS is working with influencers who enjoy outdoor activities – including climbing, walking and wild swimming – to inspire consumers to cook from scratch," explains Mrs Cameron. "We will also be sharing recipes to 'Make & Take' for picnics, as the weather improves and restrictions ease."

Opportunities were also seized at Easter, with an Easter Scotch Lamb meal box promoted in partnership with Thyme 2 Dine, to encourage consumers to celebrate with lamb.

Download the QMS toolkit, with key messages and social assets for the industry to use and share, at [www.qmscotland.co.uk](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk).

## Export marketing success for Welsh Lamb



More consumers purchased and cooked lamb at home for the first time in 2020 and HCC is aiming to replicate this success in its valuable export markets across the globe.

The Middle East is a key market for growth for Welsh Lamb exports, with sales of UK sheep meat increasing there by 18.3% in 2020 compared to 2019 and 368% compared to 2018. Four new retailers have been secured as stockists of PGI Welsh Lamb in Qatar during the past year, along with a high-end online retailer in the United Arab Emirates.

For most of HCC's marketing work there has been a shift during the past 12 months from physical events and tradeshows to digital marketing and advertising, with the onset of Covid-19 restrictions. However, Dubai's Gulfood event is the exception. Supported by Welsh Government, Welsh Lamb had a presence at the trade show – the first physical event to be held for more

## Delicious ads set to whet consumers' appetites



How products and recipe ideas look, how easy they are to cook, nutritional content and affordability are all major factors AHDB considers when planning its marketing and advertising campaigns.

For home economist, food stylist and AHDB Food Communications Manager Denise Spencer-Walker (pictured), it's a finely balanced task.

"Our most recent advertising brief was to create red meat and dairy recipes that were easy to cook and affordable. They needed to use readily-available ingredients and also be in line with the trends of flavours people like to eat," she says.

"The food has to look as tempting as possible – and look delicious on screen. This means perfectly cooked medium-rare steaks, lean lamb and pork that looks juicy."

To ensure food looks 'fresh out of the oven' when cameras are rolling, Mrs Spencer-Walker and her team use smoke machines, blow torches, tweezers and paint brushes to make sure the aesthetics are perfect.

"It can be difficult when filming food, as sometimes it only looks 'good' for a finite amount of time. Meat can be particularly tricky to get absolutely right," she adds. "If you hang around for too long you need to cook it again. Everything has to be perfect – and we think our latest recipes really hit the spot."

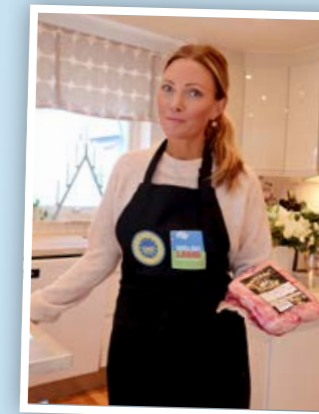
AHDB's newest lamb recipes include a traybake of lamb cutlets, new potatoes, red onions, peppers and ras el hanout spice mix.

For this recipe and further inspiration, visit [www.simplybeefandlamb.co.uk](http://www.simplybeefandlamb.co.uk).



than a year. Other digital events have been planned across the Middle East region to further strengthen Welsh Lamb's profile in the market.

A little closer to home, influencer marketing has proved successful in the growing Scandinavian market. Leading food bloggers, Swedish influencers Victoria Riis (pictured) and Kardenmumma Gumman, have preached the virtues of PGI Welsh Lamb as well as sharing exclusive recipes showcasing Welsh Lamb cuts. Working with bloggers and influencers allows HCC to connect with shoppers and consumers while social distancing rules and restrictions are in place.



## Developing new products and consumer awareness



British Wool has continued its consumer-targeted marketing approach throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Marketing Director Graham Clark.

"With our licensee scheme now well established in the UK, with more than 50 brands on board, we have been working on increasing consumer awareness about British wool," he says.

"Our digital strategy has evolved during the past two years and our total social media following now exceeds 100,000 – and continues to grow. This is an excellent platform to help push our licensee's brands and sales of British wool rich products. And it also allows us to educate consumers about, why, for example, sheep need to be shorn and how sheep support the UK countryside."

He adds that the organisation's website also plays a crucial role in targeting end users. "Consumer traffic has increased significantly during the past 12 months and, to capitalise on this, we will be launching an e-commerce website that will allow our licensee's to sell their British wool rich products direct to consumers."

As well as providing a platform to drive consumer demand for British wool rich products, it will also offer an opportunity to gain a better understanding of consumer-buying trends and this, in turn, will help shape British Wool's future strategy.

British Wool is also working on a number of new product development projects. "This is key to driving additional demand and we are working on more projects than ever before."

"These products include 100% British wool carpet ranges through to innovative uses of British wool across a broad range of industries. Some of these new developments are long-term projects, which should increase demand over time. Others are more short term and will be launched in 2021, offering more immediate increased demand for British wool," adds Mr Clark.

More on wool on page 32.





# Removing the barriers to sheep meat consumption

Red meat consumption has been steadily decreasing across Europe during the past few decades, with less sheep meat now sold than chicken and beef.

However, increasing consumer interest in healthier and more sustainable meat products provides red meat producers with the opportunity to differentiate through 'ecolabels', origin and health claims.

That's just one of the findings from NSA-supported iSAGE work (see panel) that looked at people's perceptions of red meat and why they do – or don't – consume it. It also identified barriers to red meat consumption and ways to remove them.

Responses on lamb, beef and goat were collected from 2,900 people in Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey and the UK. Specific work on sheep meat consumption showed consumers associated sheep meat with a unique taste, authenticity and natural production, linked with values such as sheep health and quality of life. In contrast, non-consumers are 'put off' when they think about sheep and sheep meat and do not associate any specific health benefits to it.

## Perception

The project highlighted health and the pleasure of eating as the main themes. Consumers perceived sheep meat as tasty, natural and healthy, due to its lower environmental impact and fat content compared to other meats. In contrast, non-consumers considered it not healthy and not satisfying.

The work also examined consumer willingness to pay for health and 'ethical' labels on lamb and sheep meat. Eight attributes were analysed including: national origin, EU origin, halal, organic, carbon footprint, protein content, fat content, and ready-to-cook format.

Willingness to pay was estimated for each attribute and the results showed there are significant differences between countries in terms of

preferences and their willingness to pay for diverse attributes. However, national origin and organic are always the most preferred attributes.

The project report concludes there are limitations to the results, but they could form the basis of further studies to confirm findings so far in larger samples and on special populations looking for specific attributes (such as halal certification among the growing Muslim population across Europe).

## Consumption

However, these findings do allow some strategies to be set in motion to increase the consumption of lamb and sheep meat. First, communication of the benefits related to its healthiness and provision of more detailed information on the food labels, in terms of processing characteristics.

Increasing the visibility of this meat, via TV cookery programmes and magazine articles, and communicating the versatility and ease of cooking are also possible strategies for increasing its appeal and consumption.

Consumers expressed interest in having more information on labelling about the production methods and traceability of lamb and sheep meat and the positive effects on human health – although separate studies have also shown that too much information on labels can be confusing.

More about iSAGE at [www.isage.eu](http://www.isage.eu).



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# Key considerations for retirement

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

Formal retirement schemes have been a recurring theme for every generation, particularly when it comes to the difficult question of how tenant farmers, reliant on their tenancy for housing, can exit the sector.

The Future of Farming Review group, reporting in 2013, recommended coordinated action to help support owner-occupiers and tenant farmers plan retirement and succession at an earlier age.

The sector is finally seeing the emergence of an exit scheme in England. The Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland authorities may or may not follow suit. Farmers will know more when post-Brexit agricultural policies have been firmed up during the next few months.

## Schemes

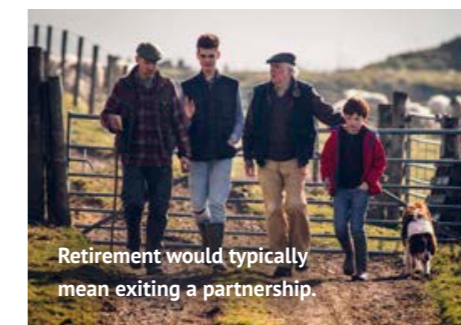
In England, Defra is planning to introduce an exit scheme in 2022. In the first policy statements on post-Brexit schemes, this was an all-purpose lump-sum payment. Its scope has now been narrowed down to those leaving the sector, which will be one of the conditions. Other stipulations are yet to be firmed up and further details are awaited via a Defra consultation document. Measures will also be introduced to facilitate new entrants, but it is not clear if, or how, these two policy strands will be joined.

Exit payments will be based on what applicants would have received in direct payments during the rest of the transition period (between 2023 and 2027). They are unlikely to be life-changing but may – with other assets realised as part of the process – facilitate genuine retirement.

It will be the scheme's small print that determines what is possible. Given that the BPS

claimant is typically the farming business, a key point will be whether retirements within that business will be covered by the scheme. Flexibility to allow an older member of a farming partnership to exit while the next generation continues would make for the most positive restructuring. But the next generation will face the rest of the transition without direct payments – a critical consideration in a sheep enterprise.

Whatever the shape of the final scheme, its introduction is causing retirement-age farmers in the sheep sector to consider their options.



Retirement would typically mean exiting a partnership.

The following points may help in planning an orderly exit from the farming business, without any unpleasant surprises.

Take stock. If a lump-sum exit payment were available to you, would this accelerate/facilitate a course of action you are already contemplating? Be clear about the distinction between land ownership/tenancies and your sheep enterprise. Retiring from the business does not necessarily mean selling land or relinquishing tenancies.

If you are in a farming partnership, retirement would typically mean exiting the partnership. Check what your partnership agreement says about the notice period you need to give and about how your share in the partnership will be dealt with at the end of that notice period.

If you are a shareholder in a farming company, retirement will typically involve your resignation as a director and the transfer of your shares in the company to others. Again, check what the company's articles of association and any shareholders agreement say about notice that needs to be given on any proposed share transfer and any restrictions on transfer. Consider how your retirement will impact on others involved in the business. Do you have any employees or contract shepherds? If so, their position will need to be taken into account.

## Implications

Don't forget memberships, such as those of marketing co-ops and purchasing groups. Check to see if they need to be transferred to other family members, or if nominated representatives need to change. If you are a sole trader, check notice periods, your account and any loans outstanding/credit falling to be paid out to you.

Check the small print of any environmental or land management schemes in your name. Can these be transferred? Are you able to ensure continued compliance until the end of any term?

The tax implications of any disposal of assets needs to be checked early in the process. It may be that retirement from the farming business will also be a moment for some comprehensive tax planning/transfers of land or tenancies to the next generation.

Document any exit agreements reached with farming partners/family members.

Review your will to see whether changes need to be made to reflect any alteration in your partnership or shareholder status.

Roythornes administers the NSA Legal Helpline for members. More from NSA Head Office.



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# Alternative to plastic tree shelters lead the way on wool innovation

With prices hit so badly by Covid-19, finding new and innovative uses for wool has never been more important.

One particularly interesting venture NSA has recently learnt about is replacing plastic tree shelters with a wool-based alternative.

The plastic guards, put in place when trees are planted, are deemed essential to the survival of young trees for numerous reasons, including protection from the natural elements and grazing herbivores such as rabbits and deer.

However, as the use of plastic comes under increasing global scrutiny, attention has turned to the staggering numbers of tree shelters being used. The figures are unclear but are thought to be more than 700m in the UK in 35 years, with some estimates putting it as high as two billion.

## Recycling issues

As the polypropylene material used is not biodegradable, the shelters should be collected and recycled – but this tends not to happen due to cost.

Trees are recognised as playing an important role in climate-change mitigation, water and flood management, and nature recovery – hence the ambitious planting targets of all governments. But Gary Hurlstone, of NexGen Tree

Shelters, believes this should not be at the cost of damaging the environment in other ways.

“My father Graham invented and launched the Tubex tree shelter in 1985,” he says. “Their use transformed the industry and is responsible for some of the UK’s most successful new woodlands during recent years. Dad sold the business in 1995, but plastic tree shelters continued to provide an invaluable service and have done during the past 35 years.

“Today we have a better understanding of how plastics can cause lasting damage to the countryside, wildlife and waterways. So the goal of NexGen is to eradicate the use of polypropylene tree shelters and nylon ties, replacing them with viable, cost-effective, environmentally friendly alternatives within the next five years. Recent advances in technology now make this achievable.”

He says extensive testing by NexGen saw wool ‘stand out’ as the perfect substrate. This was due to its ability to be processed with a natural polyol resin, its structure, nitrogen content, biodegradation qualities, and low carbon footprint. Many other materials were considered, including rice husks, wood pulp and hemp.

Similar effort went to exploring recent developments in natural polyols, with sustainably-sourced cashew nutshell liquid and castor oil identified as the ideal polyol to work with the wool.

Mr Hurlstone adds: “After several years of development, we now have a product that is ready to replace plastic tree shelters. We are already working with more than 1,200 sheep farmers across the UK to source wool, and this will no doubt increase. The aim is to work with hill sheep farmers and pay them a fair price for their wool.

## Feedback

“Trials have begun across the UK, Australia, Sweden and North America, with foresters and landowners, and the initial feedback has been very positive. We are now taking orders for next season’s planting, which will require at least 40 tonnes of British wool.”

For context, the UK produces around 50,000 tonnes of wool annually. Mr Hurlstone predicts his company will need 1,200 tonnes of wool by year five of business – and up to 3,000 tonnes if the UK Government target to plant 50m trees a year progresses and export opportunities take off, including guards for vineyards.

He concludes: “I firmly believe we can achieve great things when it comes to the fight against climate change, the increasing demand for timber, the reduction of commercial plastics in our countryside, and support for UK sheep farmers at a critical and difficult time for the industry.”

## NSA calls for wool innovation

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, recently appeared on BBC Countryfile calling for a wool market that is more resilient and exploits all the numerous uses for the fibre.

Mr Stocker says: “I was interviewed for 15 minutes and said how important British Wool is and that the industry would be a worse place without it. Of course, the 30-second clip bit was the most challenging. But I stand by my comment that I’d like to see British Wool working harder to establish a more resilient market for wool, and that it is dangerous to have too many eggs in one basket.

“Wool is an incredibly sustainable fibre that could be used far more widely than it is – particularly when there is an urgency to replace plastics and synthetic materials. We need to drive demand and create new uses for wool. So I want to see innovations such as these tree shelters succeed, alongside the development of many more opportunities.”

*If you are involved in an innovative use of wool, let us know about it at [enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk).*

Why plant trees for the environment and then wrap them in plastic? Wool-based tree shelters could revolutionise the market.



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# Does tall-grass grazing work for sheep?

By Liz Genever, contributor

Interest is growing in regenerative farming techniques, as farmers become more focussed on soil health and sustainable ruminant production.

A regenerative approach is linked to enhancing biodiversity above and below the ground. One technique that is synonymous with regenerative farming is mob grazing, which is also known as tall-grass grazing. This is when very high stocking densities of stock (mobs) are grazed on pastures that have been allowed to 'express themselves' – as long rest periods are deemed fundamental for grassland.

The preference is for non-ryegrass swards because ryegrass tends to fall over at tall heights. Permanent pastures tend to be favoured, or multi-species swards are established to replicate diverse permanent pastures. The stock is moved frequently, ideally daily, with electric fencing systems being used to ration grazing. Wider benefits, including reduced fertiliser use and lower parasite risks (reduced chemical use), are also expected.

## Approaches

There are two approaches – non-selective and selective. Non-selective is when livestock is grazed with the aim of removing most of the plant material to tight residues (approximately 1,500kgDM/ha or 4cm). During the rest period, due to the high amount of leaf material, the roots develop and sugars that leaked out of the root storage system help feed soil life. As the pasture is 'reset', high quality material grows back.

The selective approach is based around the idea of grazing a third, leaving a third

and trampling a third. The trampled material provides feed for soil life and the third that has been eaten gives the next grazing a head start, but can affect sward quality.

Tall-grass grazing approaches were developed in countries with poorer soil health and shorter growing seasons than the UK, due to either cold or dry weather conditions. They stockpile pasture when it grows and allocate it back in a controlled manner. While enhancing soil health and building ground resilience, the aim is to grow more pasture and provide a habitat for birds, pollinators and wildlife.

## Residuals

Grass typically grows for more than 250 days a year in the UK and moisture rarely limits growth. In some systems organic matter is not the limiting factor either. But, as the seasons change and there is less certainty regarding rainfall, farmers are looking for ways to manage risk and tall-grass grazing is one option.

It is a well-established technique for cattle grazing and an array of YouTube videos, discussion groups and podcasts are available to support decision making.

There is less evidence on how it can work for sheep systems and there are some concerns about pasture quality and lamb performance. The key point is that lactating ewes and growing lambs can select the best grazing, with a lower priority class of stock being used to control residuals. This could be weaned ewes or cattle.

There is a practical challenge of shepherding sheep in tall grass. Some farmers have reported higher levels of foot problems, mastitis and fly problems. But these can be controlled by selecting the right type of sheep (or culling the wrong ones) for this system.



## Regenerative techniques suit soil and sheep

Richard Thomas runs 60 Hereford cattle and around 300 outdoor-lambing ewes on his family's 300-acre (120ha) Herefordshire-based farm. He is using regenerative techniques across the farm to 'supercharge' and improve the health of the soil.

His goals are to reduce fertiliser and chemical use to lower input costs because he's making plans for the end of the BPS, but also mainly due to the impact on soil biology. He believes tall-grass grazing will prolong the life of the swards,

Mr Thomas lambs ewes on lower covers (1,800-2,000kgDM/ha) and then starts to tighten them up at four to five weeks to start a loose rotation. This allows the grass heights to build and then they move to one or two-day grazing periods on taller swards. He is considering building a grass wedge up from early spring and is aiming to achieve at least 300g/day DLWG in lambs. He has already seen a reduction in worm burdens.

Watch ReGenAg chat – Can sheep be regenerative?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvVctFWrHtY>



This article has been written as a joint initiative between NSA and the British Grassland Society.

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Wearing a helmet is essential to help prevent serious injury from quad bike accidents.

## Use your head – wear a helmet

In a recent survey, just 30% of farmers said they wore a helmet frequently, or always, while driving an ATV or quad bike, although 63.5% reported they owned a helmet.

This is despite the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and others recommending farmers wear a helmet when riding the more than 6,000 ATVs estimated to be in use on UK farms.

Amy Irwin of Aberdeen University conducted the study. She says: "The downside to this is ATVs are also linked to farming fatalities and injuries every year."

### Accidents

"Two people die in ATV accidents every year in the UK and, based on HSE accident and fatality reports, another 1,000 are injured," explains Miss Irwin. "Most commonly the rider is injured or killed through being thrown from the ATV, with resulting damage to the head, torso and limbs.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the most frequent injury is to the head and face.

"And although accidents are reported in the press, farmers still don't wear a helmet when riding quad bikes. We wanted to find out why not."

The survey was completed by 211 UK and Irish farmers. To determine what the barriers to wearing a helmet were, they were asked to complete a 'helmet wearing attitude' scale. This produced some interesting factors.

- Farmers were less likely to wear a helmet if they felt they were exempt from harm, usually via perceived driving expertise, or travel on easy, flat terrain
- Where farmers felt pushed for time and were rushing, they were less likely to wear a helmet.
- If a rider felt 'silly' wearing a helmet they were less likely to put one on.
- Data emphasised there was stigma around helmet wearing among some farmers – it wasn't perceived as 'macho'.

"In contrast, where a farmer felt a helmet enhanced safety, where they felt it was their obligation to wear a helmet, or where they perceived prompts from guidelines and the media, they were more likely to wear their helmet more often," says Miss Irwin.

The survey also asked farmers open-ended questions to get further insight into their thoughts around helmets. "Key themes indicated the style and comfort of the helmet was important," she adds. "If the helmet could interfere with farm work, or was uncomfortable, it wasn't worn."

This is a point that NSA member and Carmarthen-based sheep producer Llew Thomas agrees with. "There is reluctance by farmers and workers to wear a helmet because some types are heavy and uncomfortable to work in. But there are helmets specially designed for quad bike use that are light and comfortable," he says.

"I also believe farmers should prioritise appropriate ATV training, because quad bike capabilities and responses often vary due to weather, terrain, load and speed.

### ATV safety rules

Highlighting the importance of responsible ATV use, quad bike manufacturer and supplier Can-Am provides these seven golden rules.

- Always wear the correct personal protective equipment when riding.
- Prepare an itinerary before setting off and communicate it to the people close to you.
- Follow the recommendations for use that are specified by the manufacturer in the operator's guide, as well as on the safety labels placed on the vehicle.
- Follow maintenance instructions as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Inspect the vehicle before use to make sure it is in good working order.
- Take along communication devices and breakdown equipment.
- Be mindful of the animals you come across and do not damage their natural habitat.



"It is also worth remembering any accident where someone is killed or injured while using a quad bike, without wearing a suitable helmet, leaves the owner at risk of prosecution for negligence with a hefty fine or prison sentence if found guilty."

### Fatalities

Mr Thomas continues: "Farming has a poor safety record. Farming accident fatalities have remained, stubbornly, at 20-30 a year, and a quarter of deaths are quad related. Most fatal and life changing accidents involve head injuries, so wearing a helmet could help to prevent this."

In terms of changing perceptions about wearing helmets, Miss Irwin says raising awareness, through sharing stories from accident and injury survivors, will be vital. "These are likely to be more impactful and engaging than statistics."

She also recommends a campaign to raise awareness of the range of helmets on offer and highlight to farmers the choices available, to ensure they get the right helmet for them. Increased portrayal of farmers wearing helmets in the media and via posters and flyers at farming events and markets would help too.

"It's also important to make it easier for farmers to store helmets with/on ATVs. If it's handy they are more likely to put it on," she concludes.

Invest in a comfortable helmet – and wear it.



### Helmet discount offer

To promote safe ATV use, NSA is delighted to be working with Dalton's ATVs to offer all Sheep Farmer readers a 10% discount on ATV helmets ordered before Friday 28th May 2021. Details at [go.nationalsheep.org.uk/quadbikesafety](http://go.nationalsheep.org.uk/quadbikesafety).



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# Assess coccidiosis threat to protect early growth in lambs

Achieving good numbers of healthy lambs born alive is a key starting point for successful lambing – and an obvious target to consider, compared with the expected lamb number after scanning.

Once lambs have survived the high-risk first 48 hours of life, the next challenge for farmers and vets is to ensure they continue to thrive.

A growing lamb requires plenty of milk and moderate challenges from diseases and pathogens that, ideally, stimulate and prime the lamb's immune system without overwhelming and causing disease. Close attention to ewe body condition pre-lambing, and ensuring the ewe's pre and post-lambing nutrition is sufficient to maximise both colostrum and milk supply, is important here.

## Immunity

Good nutrition is also essential for lamb growth and where this is sub optimal, or there are other stress-factors, diseases such as orf (parapox virus) and coccidiosis are more prevalent and severe.

A high functioning immune system is key to preventing severe disease and to developing immunity for further protection as the lamb grows.

Where lambs are growing well, reaching 300g/day DLWG, they are better placed to fend off a disease challenge. But where that disease challenge is high, all lambs can succumb quickly.

Coccidiosis is a common disease that affects lamb growth and causes losses in early life. It can also lead to significant gut damage, causing reduced growth rates and delayed finishing times in affected lambs.

Coccidiosis oocysts (eggs) are deposited into the environment in low numbers through the faeces of adult sheep and can be found in large numbers in the faeces of older lambs. Lambs shed extremely high numbers of oocysts because their immune systems are not yet functioning enough to reduce the numbers of internal cocci protozoa.

These coccidial oocysts will survive in damp conditions both in housing and on pasture. They become infective when humidity and temperatures reach optimum conditions. This stage can take as long as a year, or as little as two days.

Once a lamb has ingested the oocysts, they start to develop in cells of both the large and

By Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

small intestine, causing cell damage, and rupture as they mature into further cocci oocysts. As these are passed out in the faeces, the cycle continues. The environment becomes further contaminated and this happens on a significant scale. For every ingested egg, there are 250,000-500,000 eggs produced and deposited back into the environment.

## Coccidia

There are 15 different species of coccidia, but only two of them cause disease in lambs – *Eimeria crandallis* and *Eimeria ovinoidalis*. There may be large numbers of coccidial oocysts present in lamb faeces, but it is only significant if the pathogenic species are present. This is one of the reasons why vets encourage farmers to take pooled samples from lambs and ask the lab for coccidia speciation, rather than just egg numbers.

Coccidiosis is interesting because it is actually the exposure of very young lambs (up to a week old) that allows the lambs to develop immunity to developing severe disease.

It is young lambs that are kept in a cocci-free environment (perhaps due to their mothers being on treatment or if they are inside in clean

## Main risk factors for coccidiosis

### High oocyst challenge

- Faeces in water or food supply.
- Dirty conditions.
- Older lambs previously in field.
- Heavily stocked.

### Susceptible lambs

- Between four and 12 weeks old.
- No previous exposure to the pathogenic strain of coccidia species.
- Stress due to cold wet weather and/or poor nutrition.
- The youngest lambs in a group containing a wide range of ages.

conditions), which are most at risk of infection at just a few weeks old.

Three things can happen to lambs that ingest the infective oocysts:

- Lambs become sick and show clinical signs. Grey, sometimes blood-stained scour/diarrhoea, stained tail, hunched/tucked up, teeth grinding and weak.
- Lambs are found dead (suddenly), due to severe dehydration caused by overwhelming challenge and intestinal damage/haemorrhagic enteritis.
- Lambs may appear clinically alright but they often have unseen gut damage that may present as mild scour or may only be seen as reduced growth rates as they age. These lambs will shed large numbers of eggs, which contaminate the environment further and are a huge risk to younger lambs in the group or those that follow on grazing.

Often the signs of cocci are detected in a flock by scour and poor thrift at four to six weeks old – and in severe cases mortality is also seen. Once these clinical signs have been detected, it is likely there maybe be growth-limiting sub-clinical coccidiosis affecting the rest of the flock.



## #PlanPreventProtect

Treatment and prevention of coccidiosis can be farm specific and requires a discussion with your vet to determine the most effective control plan, ensuring the correct treatment at the correct time to the correct group of lambs is being used.

Often lambs are treated too soon and before they have had sufficient exposure to allow the development of immunity. They then require treatment again, if the disease challenge is overwhelming. Talk to your vet about the age group of lambs, the length of previous exposure, and the treatment options available to ensure more accurate timing and treatments.



Lambs are most at risk from coccidiosis when they are a few weeks old.

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# Review recent and reoccurring use to reduce antibiotic reliance

By Georgina Barnhurst, Cross Counties Farm Vets **vetPartners**

The UK livestock sector has successfully reduced antibiotic use in recent years, but it is important to remember that every time an antibiotic is used, even responsibly, the chance of bacteria developing resistance to it is increased.

The accepted approach to medicine use on farm is 'as little as possible, as much as necessary'. This will optimise the balance between the immediate health and welfare of animals, and the future need to keep antibiotics available as a tool for both animals and people.

Sheep farmers and vets should concentrate on the situations in which antibiotics are more frequently used – during lambing, to control infectious abortions and to control lameness – and look to minimise use to only when it's absolutely necessary.

In the past, antibiotics were used to control enzootic abortion by blanket treating all ewes

with oxytetracyclines during pregnancy. This practice has declined dramatically during the past decade, with oxytetracyclines now mostly used to control an outbreak. But preventative use does still occur on some farms.

## Protection

There is a highly-effective vaccine that can be given to ewes prior to tupping. This offers protection for several lambing seasons and is the most appropriate way to control enzootic abortions. In conjunction with this, ensuring ewes are going to tup in the right body condition score and maintaining this during pregnancy, by consistently providing the correct level of nutrition, will support healthy lamb development.

Unfortunately it's still fairly common practice to dose every lamb born with oral antibiotics for watery mouth, the disease caused by e.coli colonisation in the small intestine. This was a typical recommendation a few years ago, but farmers and vets should aim to eliminate this type of preventative use.

There are various ways to reduce the need for antibiotics during lambing. Having ewes in the correct body condition score, feeding them correctly to produce good quality colostrum and ensuring the lambs get enough colostrum within the first 24 hours after birth, are all effective ways to reduce the need for antibiotics, along with good hygiene.

If ewes do require assistance with lambing, not every case will require antibiotics. Wearing gloves and practicing good hygiene when assisting a ewe will reduce the need for antibiotic use for only the most complicated lambings.

Little changes make a big difference. Disinfecting ear taggers and elastrators between lambs can help reduce joint ill cases. Waiting for the lambs reach 24-48 hours old before ringing them also reduces stress and provides more opportunity for them to drink vital colostrum. Dipping navels in iodine as soon as possible after birth and disinfecting stomach tubes and bottle teats between uses are all quick, cost-effective ways to lower infection risk – and reduce the requirement for antibiotic treatments.

## Opportunity

With many farms now finishing lambing for this year, there is an opportunity to reflect on how antibiotics were used and identify how their use could be reduced next year. Speak to your vet to review this year's records, as they will be able to help put a plan in place to prioritise ewe nutrition, hygiene and colostrum management, and enable an informed reduction in antibiotics use during lambing 2022.

Most lameness in sheep, such as scald, footrot and contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), is caused by infectious bacteria. Non-contagious lameness, such as overgrown hoof, are less common. It is essential to understand the cause of lameness to choose the right treatment. Tackling lameness needs a multi-pronged approach, and appropriate use of antibiotics has an important role in the treatment and control of lameness.

Prompt separation of affected stock and treatment with an appropriate antibiotic is key to stop the spread of bacteria to other sheep. This prompt treatment and isolation, along with appropriate quarantine of incoming stock, culling of chronically affected animals, selective breeding for resilience and vaccinating against footrot, will reduce lameness cases and, therefore, overall antibiotic usage.

Footbathing is an effective way to reduce the spread of bacteria, particularly at high-risk times such as after gathering and handling. It is imperative to use an appropriate product, such as one containing zinc sulphate or formalin. Using an antibiotic in a footbath is not acceptable. The chosen product should be diluted to the correct concentration and animals should stand on a hard surface afterwards. Hands and equipment can also transfer bacteria, so changing gloves or washing hands with disinfectant between animals is key.

## Alternatives

Farmers and vets can work together to identify where antibiotics are being used and plan alternatives to reduce risk of disease. In some cases, it is appropriate to use an antibiotic, for example in the treatment of lameness. But this should be done only when treating affected animals that have been separated from the main flock, to reduce risk of antibiotic resistance developing as a result.

A 'just in case' approach to using antibiotics, or other medicines like anthelmintics, risks a situation where diseases that were previously treatable are no longer so due to the development of resistance.



Bedding in the lambing shed should be clean and dry to help keep disease at bay.

At the end of 2021 lambing, look at antibiotic usage and plan for 2022.



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There can be benefits to transitioning lambs onto creep before weaning.

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# Planning ahead key to weaning success

Weaning may be a way off, but it will pay off to plan early to maintain lamb health and minimise potential growth checks, says Csaba Adamik of Lallemand Animal Health.

He believes it is particularly important to ensure a good dietary transition when weaning lambs onto a creep-fed system. Mr Adamik says: "If the lamb's rumen isn't prepared for an increase in concentrate feed intake at this time, rumen microbiota can be affected and this not only has health implications but can also cause lead to a fall in growth rate."

"For lambs to grow and minimise any post weaning dip in performance, it is important to encourage rumen development so they can utilise their new diet."

He suggests preparing lambs early by introducing a creep feed well in advance of weaning. "If you have high volumes of grass available, it can be tempting to avoid introducing creep feed until the point of weaning to keep costs down. But if prior to this point they have only fed on milk and grass, the rumen will not be adequately developed to digest concentrate feed."

"To develop the rumen there needs to be starch in the diet, to produce a large enough amount of volatile fatty acid. This sends a chemical message to the rumen wall to develop the papillae, which play a pivotal role in nutrient absorption in the rumen."

## Gut microflora

Mr Adamik adds this transition can be further supported by supplementing a probiotic live yeast within the concentrate.

"Adding a rumen specific live yeast will help develop the rumen microbiota both during and after weaning. It scavenges oxygen within the rumen, creating an environment that is more favourable for beneficial microflora establishment. Rumen development is essential for the lamb to increase concentrate intake and digest its total diet successfully, supporting growth and performance."

Lambs with digestive issues will also be more prone to parasitic disease, such as coccidiosis. "There is a correlation between digestive disturbances and coccidiosis infection, and farmers should be alert to a heightened risk around weaning."

Coccidiosis causes damage to the lining of the gut, but can often be subclinical with reduced weight gain the only tell-tale sign.

Adequate feed space is also key to successful weaning, particularly when housing lambs. "If they don't have enough space to access feed freely, they're going to eat quickly and will be more likely to develop digestive disturbances like bloat. The way lambs are fed is almost as important as what they are fed," says Mr Adamik.

While it goes without saying that water access is also crucial, he reiterates the need to check water troughs are clean and easily accessible for lambs – and that there are enough of them.

"Encourage lambs to drink because water intake encourages concentrate intake, and vice versa," he says. "As well as reducing feed intakes, insufficient water can also disturb the rumen. In combination, this can really limit daily liveweight gain."

He says providing lambs with free access salt blocks also offers benefits. "Salt will help them to regulate their appetite and intake of water and can help to support lambs on post-weaning diets."

"There are many factors to consider when weaning lambs but, by planning the process carefully and well in advance, you can be more confident that health and growth rates will be maintained post weaning."



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A pooled sample means taking at least 10 fresh samples from a mob.

# Timely reminder to test, test, test...

## More sheep farmers are testing for anthelmintic resistance, which is great news.

But, with many facing results that indicate they have resistance to two or more of the wormer groups, what should they do? Don't panic is the first piece of advice. The results can initially look daunting but in most cases the situation is not bleak, and there is certainly no need to assume you can no longer use group 1 (BZ-white), 2 (LV-yellow) or 3 (ML-clear) wormer products.

For most farms, a close look at the results, and testing at different times of year, will show the older three groups can still be used at certain times. What's key is that farmers don't have a knee jerk reaction and simply jump to only using the group 4 (AD-orange) and 5 (SI-purple) wormers.

These two groups are a vital part of the overall solution, but must not be used in isolation. There



A wormer may be effective in the spring but not in autumn, or vice versa.

are a few examples in the UK where sheep farmers suspected a multiple-resistance issue and used an orange wormer repeatedly. This then resulted in resistance to the product.

The good news is that if testing shows the early stages of anthelmintic resistance, there are a number of actions farmers can take to slow its development. Examples include reducing the use of wormers by implementing options such as targeted treatments, grazing management and ensuring every dose is given accurately.

## Resistance

SCOPS has put together a guide on how to assess how anthelmintics are working on farm. Testing is vital and there are currently two types of test for resistance on farms.

The first is a simple drench test, which involves taking a pooled faecal sample (FEC) from a mob of sheep after they are wormed. A pooled sample means taking at least 10 fresh samples from a mob. And tests should be carried out at seven days for yellow wormers and at 14 days for all other groups.

Farmers should then check if the treatment has been effective by looking for worm eggs. The value of this test is greatly enhanced by also taking a FEC sample before the sheep are wormed, so you can work out the percentage reduction.

Anything less than a 90% reduction suggests there may be a resistance issue. A count above 50 eggs per gram (epg) in a post-treatment test, where the pre-treatment count was 500epg would, for example, suggest resistance.

The second test is a more detailed and accurate test called a faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT). This uses the same marked sheep where their FEC is determined before treatment

and then, again, seven to 14 days later. Often one or more of the wormer groups are tested on 10 sheep per group. The results are expressed as a percentage reduction and resistance is said to have been detected when this is less than 95%.

## Repeat

For accurate results, be sure to take FEC samples carefully and that all the sheep are treated with the right dose.

The test must also be repeated at different times during the season. The main worm species affecting sheep change throughout the year and the resistance profile to the different wormers also varies between the worm species. This means it is common to find a wormer group can be used effectively in the spring but not in autumn, or vice versa. But to establish this, you need to keep checking what products are working at different times of year. One test, whether it's a drench test or a more detailed FECRT, is not enough to determine what is really happening on farm.

Interpreting results is also important and this is where vets and advisers can help. Detecting resistance is not necessarily bad news if the levels are relatively low. It may mean a wormer group is ineffective against certain species in the spring, but effective against other species in the autumn.

With this knowledge, lambs will benefit and you can avoid wasting time and money. If resistance is caught early you will probably be able to continue using some wormer groups, but with greater care to avoid accelerating the development of resistance.

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

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



# High levels of resistance detected, but still time to take action



A project in Wales has detected resistance to one or more wormer groups on 98% of participating farms.

"At first sight this seems worrying but, because the testing is relatively sensitive and accurate, it means that on many farms we are identifying resistance in the early stages," says sheep specialist James Hadwin, who is delivering the testing service for Farming Connect.

"That's great news for the farmers involved, because it means if they are careful and take advice they can maintain good levels of worm control," he adds.

The initiative, which is funded through the Farming Connect Advisory Service, uses a flock faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT) to establish whether resistance exists to anthelmintic drenches. In 2020, 49 sheep farms used the service and testing was carried out between June and November.

This was fully funded because the farm businesses worked in groups of between three and eight – it is 80% funded for farmers who want a one-to-one service.

## Samples

Sampling packs were provided by parasite management company Techion and faecal egg counts (FECs) were carried out on pooled dung samples. Reading of around 500 eggs per gram (epg) were required to start the process.

FECs were taken from at least 90 lambs that had not been wormed for at least four weeks.

Once this baseline was set, lambs were split into four treatment groups with 20 in each group. They were dosed under strict protocols with either a white drench (1-BZ), yellow drench (2-LV), clear drench (3-ML) or moxidectin.

A sample was taken from each lamb by a trained technician and repeated seven or 14 days later, depending on the type of drench used.

The samples were then sent to the lab to assess the efficacy of that wormer group.

Mr Hadwin of JH Agri Consultancy (AgriPlan Cymru) says the results are concerning, but stressed that if farmers take positive action to reduce their reliance on wormers on the back of their results, they can achieve good worm control.

Actions include more attention to detail in flock management to reduce worm burden and also, should the stock need worming, in making the right choice of product.

"The results in 2020 have shown there is an issue with wormer resistance in the industry and that we need to act now," he says. "This project is helping farms to get a handle on their situation and encouraging people to follow SCOPS principles."

## Overuse

He hopes it will be a prerequisite to farmers working more closely with their vets and advisors in formulating a robust flock health plan, to avoid overuse of wormers and adding to the cost of production.

He says: "Time and labour are among the highest costs on sheep farms. If you don't need to be drenching lambs, why do it?"

He adds that, when time is limited, lambs are sometimes dosed simply because they had been gathered for another management task. "There is an element of 'if the sheep are in for other things we might as well worm them'. But by planning ahead and carrying out a FEC before handling, we know if the lambs actually needed worming and if this is best practice."

A key element of the Farming Connect project is to help farmers identify resistance and put strategies in place to maintain wormer efficacy where possible, while also improving worm control. Each participating farm receives a detailed report including their results and a set of recommendations, along with an action plan outlining a way forward. Farmers are also encouraged to work with their vet or advisor.

"While there has been progress, there is evidence some farmers are not working closely enough with their vet or animal health advisor to understanding why they are using a specific product," adds Mr Hadwin.

## Team approach

"A team approach to this issue is always best. We need to protect the wormers we have available – particularly the new wormer groups – by using them strategically."

Flock management advice is also given, to help reduce the need to worm while also maintaining performance.

"I would encourage Welsh sheep farmers to make the most of the help available under this funding to address what is a concerning trend within the industry. It is vital they take steps now to reduce the chance of resistance to wormers developing on their farm," says Mr Hadwin.

## Faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT)

- FECRT is a comprehensive test for detecting anthelmintic resistance.
- It is more detailed and robust than a simple post-treatment pooled test.
- As well as showing treatment efficacy, the results also give a much truer picture of resistance status at the time of testing.

## FECRT funding

- Welsh farmers who work within groups of between three and eight farms will access testing at no cost. The full cost – more than £1,340 for testing and advice – is covered by Farming Connect.
- Farmers who prefer to work on a one-to-one basis can get the same package of advice if they contribute 20% of the cost.
- To apply for funding, contact your local Farming Connect development officer, or telephone Farming Connect's service centre on 08456 000813.





# Project set to help target selective anthelmintic treatment

Anthelmintic resistance is an increasing threat to sheep production, leading to reduced efficacy of current control and treatment options.

Problems with anthelmintic resistance are well documented globally on sheep units and particularly in Northern Ireland, where it has been detected on the majority of sheep farms.

Targeted selective treatment (TST) is one way to mitigate the problem. This offers the potential to reduce the use of anthelmintics on farm and, in turn, reduces the development of resistance.

TST approaches include targeting anthelmintics at the right time to maximise epidemiological benefits, and avoiding unnecessary treatments and/or leaving a proportion of the flock or herd untreated, making use of the fact that most worms are concentrated in a few individuals. Removing them will have significant effects on worm transmission and herd health, while reducing the number of treatments needed.

## Feasibility

A European Innovation Partnership (EIP) project, led by AgriSearch, is looking at this issue in detail and aims to determine the feasibility of implementing TST of anthelmintics on ruminant units. The EIP project group includes three beef, three dairy and two sheep farmers working in partnership with Belfast-based Queen's University, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, and Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland.

"While TST has been found to be successful during research trials, uptake on commercial farms remains limited. This is something the project aims to change," says Queen's University's Eric Morgan. "The project will develop procedures for selecting animals requiring treatment and for targeting treatment. These are the key aspects of successful TST implementation and the current primary barriers to uptake."

To facilitate decision making, each farm is investing in infrastructure and technology to enable animal performance, including liveweight gain, health and condition, to be regularly monitored. These are the key indicators of parasite presence/absence.

In particular, each farm has been supplied with a Techion FECPAK<sup>2</sup> kit to conduct faecal egg count (FEC) tests on animals. The internet-connected, image-based diagnostic platform can be used pen-side by a farmer without the need for a microscope. By providing fast and reliable results, the participating farms will be able to make anthelmintic treatment decisions quickly. Training on the use of the kits has been provided and the group is now ready to implement TST on farm during the next two years.

John Martin, a sheep farmer from Greyabbey, County Down, is one of the EIP group members. He says: "By taking part in this project, and working with new technology and the experts at Queen's University, I hope to learn more about what I need to do on farm to make effective and targeted selective treatment decisions for my flock."

By Jillian Hoy, AgriSearch



"This additional knowledge will help develop a long-term worm management strategy that can influence replacement selection, with anthelmintic resilience becoming a desirable trait."

Farmers can expect to make immediate cost savings by reducing anthelmintic use, but more significant savings are expected through improved livestock production efficiency including improved growth rates, lower mortality and earlier slaughter.

## Efficiency

The economic benefits of effective worm control are typically greatest on farms maximising the utilisation of grazed grass. The use of TST, particularly the regular monitoring of livestock that is an integral part of such a treatment regime, will also lead to improved animal health and welfare.

This project is one of seven EIP projects in Northern Ireland that see advisers, researchers and businesses work in partnership with farmers to consider how practical solutions might be developed to address a particular problem or opportunity for the agri-food industry. It is jointly funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Department of Agriculture, Environmental and Rural Affairs.

A significant shift in mindset will be required to make TST approaches common practice. To address this, the project will undertake a wide range of dissemination activities to improve knowledge transfer between researchers and farmers. These will cover parasite biology, optimal anthelmintic treatment application, the dynamics of anthelmintic resistance, the importance of adequate quarantine protocols, and sustainable parasite control.

"Practical solutions are urgently needed to help farmers control parasites in their flocks and herds while, at the same time, limiting the selection for resistance to anthelmintics," says Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland's Sam Strain. "Trialling TST in real world scenarios on Northern Ireland farms is an important step in tackling this issue. The outputs from this EIP project will provide the ruminant sector with local evidence of the effectiveness of this approach and hopefully encourage its wider adoption."

More at <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/investigate-targeted-selectivetreatment-parasites>.

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Online faecal egg countkit in use on one of the trial farms.

# New post-mortem providers expand disease surveillance network

By Amanda Carson, APHA



Three additional post-mortem providers have joined the scanning surveillance network for Great Britain, strengthening the ability to detect new and re-emerging diseases and diagnose endemic infection in livestock.

Cambridge, Liverpool and Nottingham universities have joined the existing network of post-mortem examination providers and APHA Veterinary Investigation Centres (see panel and map). Farmers within a one-hour drive of a post-mortem site are asked to transport the carcase there, whereas a free collection service is provided for several areas within England and Wales.

The expanded capacity and coverage means more vets and farmers will benefit from the services available and, therefore, more information for the benefit of the whole country can be produced. This includes regular surveillance reports (monthly and quarterly), APHA information notes and alerts on specific diseases and conditions, and more localised newsletters from individual veterinary investigation centres. In addition, population information and enhanced demographic reports can be produced to determine the risk of disease transmission.

## The GB surveillance network



### APHA Veterinary Investigation Centres

- Bury St Edmunds
- Carmarthen
- Penrith
- Shrewsbury
- Starcross
- Thirsk

### Post-mortem examination providers

- Bristol University
- Cambridge University *NEW*
- Liverpool University *NEW*
- Nottingham University *NEW*
- Royal Veterinary College
- SRUC (St Boswells)
- Surrey University
- Wales Veterinary Science Centre

## Trends

All this information is vital at a GB-level, to inform governments, the vet profession and livestock farming industries of new or re-emerging threats to sheep health or changing trends among existing ones. However, the service also allows individual farmers to access free information. Please use the network to let us know about signs of new or unusual disease you may see. Vets at APHA VICs are always happy to discuss cases with your vet and can visit your farm with them, if appropriate, to provide advice and diagnosis.

Various links to APHA services were added to the NSA website on Monday 12th April. Go to [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news).

## Services offered by APHA

- Diagnostic tests and advice, covering a wide range of endemic diseases of farmed livestock species and wildlife.
- Subsidised post-mortem examinations services.
- Free-to-farmer carcase collection for diagnostic post-mortem examinations in parts of England and Wales – use the postcode checker at <http://apha.defra.gov.uk/postcode/pme.asp>.
- Free online livestock disease surveillance dashboards.
- Surveillance reports and information, published online, via social media and once a month in Veterinary Record.

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# Scrapie monitoring rises up the agenda due to post-Brexit rules

Export requirements for scrapie monitoring are stringent.

By Alison Braddock and Dave Wilson, SRUC Veterinary Services

Now the UK has left the EU, breeders wanting to export breeding stock have got to fall in line with scrapie rules they previously avoided.

To export sheep, goats, semen and embryos to EU member states (as has always been the case for most countries outside the EU), sheep must be ARR/ARR genotype or be part of a scrapie monitoring scheme. This is also now the case for exporting from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

SRUC Veterinary Service's Scrapie Monitoring Scheme (SMS) shows that animals originate from holdings that have been scrapie monitored for at least three years for 'controlled risk', or at least seven years for 'negligible risk'.

Given the increase in importance of this scheme, here is a reminder of SMS requirements:

- Farm boundaries must be adequate to prevent animals from straying onto or off the holdings, and to prevent nose-to-nose contact between animals on other holdings.

- All animals on the holding must be inspected by an official vet at least once a year during the three or seven-year periods.
- Any animal that is culled or dies on the farm should be submitted for brain-tissue scrapie testing if it is older than 18 months and not culled as part of an official disease eradication campaign, physical injury or for human consumption. A sample of the animal's brain tissue needs to be TSE tested. The animal's head (or the whole animal) must be submitted for testing APHA, SRUC or NFSCo.
- Purchased SMS animals may retain their status only if they move onto either a SMS scheme holding or a holding that has been free from sheep or goats for the previous three or seven years.

Animals of ARR/ARR genotype, certified at a Defra-approved laboratory (currently APHA or SRUC labs), are exempt from SMS movement restrictions.

More about movements from GB to NI on pages 10-11. More on scrapie monitoring by searching 'scrapie monitoring for export' at [www.sruc.ac.uk](http://www.sruc.ac.uk).

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## Johne's and MV assurance available

SRUC's Premium Sheep and Goat Health Schemes (PSGHS) is continuing to offer monitoring for maedi visna (MV) and Johne's disease to commercial sheep farmers who would otherwise struggle with the more stringent biosecurity requirements of the PSGHS accreditation scheme.

While PSGHS accreditation is the gold standard, the monitoring schemes provide a level of assurance for buyers looking to reduce disease risk, making them particularly useful for farmers selling female breeding stock who want to provide reassurance to buyers.

Members test three groups of animals for one or both diseases, as follows:

- 12 thin ewes per year for flocks with fewer than 500 animals or 20 per year for flocks of more than 500 animals.
- Five stock rams.
- A proportion of added animals not from a monitored or accredited flock.

Samples should be taken by the flock's vet at least six weeks before animals are due to be sold. The vet selects animals for testing according to set criteria, such as low body condition score, underperformance, or those lagging behind the flock when handled. The vet will also carry out an annual appraisal of biosecurity measures. In instances where disease is found, members can take a proactive approach to manage the disease with their vet.

Monitoring scheme membership is £40 per year with discounted testing rates. More at [www.sheepandgoathealth.co.uk](http://www.sheepandgoathealth.co.uk).

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## PRODUCT AND BUSINESS NEWS

### Mini mixer ideal for sheep rations

A tractor/telehandler mounted diet feeder, suitable for mixing sheep rations, is now available in the UK through County Antrim-based dealer McMullan Agri.

Within its confined space, the VDW mini-diet feeder has twin augers with three blades on each and two hydraulic opening doors each side. The Belgian manufacturer says it mixes and chops quickly and effectively, easily handling silage bales, clamp silage, straw, concentrates and minerals.

The feeder is available in 11 different sizes and specifications, with the option of a weighing system. The largest machine has a capacity of 3m<sup>3</sup>.

More at [www.VDW.be](http://www.VDW.be) and [www.mcmullanagri.com](http://www.mcmullanagri.com).



### New rural consultancy

Ceres Rural has been launched as a new consultancy company for farmers and landowners in south and east England.

With a network of offices in Saffron Walden, Oxford and Norwich, the new partnership will cover an area spanning from Devon to Norfolk and offer expertise across ten different specialisms – farm management, agronomy, business reviews and benchmarking, grant advice, health and safety consultancy, biodiversity offsetting and environmental management.

More at [www.ceresrural.co.uk](http://www.ceresrural.co.uk).

### Weatherproof workwear now available

New Zealand-designed Betacraft workwear is now available in the UK, from Dairy Spares.

The ISO-940 rainwear range claims to be 100% waterproof yet breathable, comfortable, abrasion-resistance and rip-proof. Styles for men and women include parkas, fleece-lined hurricane jackets, over-trousers and adjustable bib over-trousers. Also available is a range of water-resistant fleeces and Techniflex rainwear.

More at [www.dairyspares.co.uk](http://www.dairyspares.co.uk).



### Bolus trial increases liveweights

Trial work with Downland Essential Lamb Boluses containing cobalt, selenium and iodine saw lambs achieve an extra 49g/day DLWG compared with un-supplemented lambs.

The work by Glasgow University vet school was on a Scottish hill farm where cobalt, selenium and copper deficiencies had been identified. The bolus was given to half of a group of 795 lambs, with blood samples taken from all lambs two months later. This showed the un-supplemented lambs had cobalt-deficient status but not selenium deficiency. Their average DLWG was 130g/day compared to 179g/day for the supplemented lambs.

# Following the flock

We catch up with a handful of NSA officeholders, based in Oxfordshire, Somerset and Lanarkshire.

## David Barber

NSA South East Committee Member, Oxfordshire



Many shepherds are now lambing or preparing to do so, but we are in full swing with new season lamb sales.

Lambs are growing very fast and we're making some of the best prices we have ever seen. At the time of writing, the most recent load of 124 lambs averaged 21.5kg deadweight.

These lambs were born in the first two weeks of December, when we lambed 1,100 Warborough ewes with a lamb drop of 255%. Warborough's are a composite ewe – 62.5% Dorset, 25% Milkshope and 12.5% Finn.

It was an extremely busy time, but we had an excellent lambing team. Our second group of 300 ewes lambed in January, at about 230%, with 300 ewe lambs lambing at the same time at 170%. The first of these lambs were ready by Easter.

Mature ewes and shearlings were synchronised and we used AI in July 2020. We achieved an 86% conception rate, with returns and ewe lambs tupped in August. Fresh semen from high index (top 5%) Charollais are mostly used for AI. Ewes selected for producing replacement stock are inseminated using Warborough rams from prolific ewes with good feet.

Most lambs, except those kept as replacements, will be sold by mid-May. But we will have a further 40 ewes lambing outdoors at the end of April, just so we don't forget how it's done!



Ewes are in good condition.



Kevin says the weather behaved itself for lambing.

## Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chairman, Somerset



After a month packed with online meetings and webinars, it was good to get outside again in March and stuck into lambing.

Although we had a slightly wet and windy start, the weather has been kind to us this year. Having my first Covid-19 vaccination right at the beginning of lambing was also welcome and it was easy to blame possible any side-effects on the workload of lambing.

Lambing has gone well. This year's focus has been on reducing the use of both anthelmintics and antibiotics, and we try to do our best with this approach here. It comes with its own challenges and requires additional attention to detail and a good eye. But it is rewarding when you get it right.

Success depends on good staff in the lambing shed, which I have been lucky to have this year. We have a great team. With 75% of the flock lambing in the first two weeks of March, it was good that were all on top of our game.

Now, as we dive head first into spring, we'll be keeping a keen eye on the nematodirus forecast and the lamb price. I hope we have some good grass growing weather and I'm looking forward to seeing people face to face later this year.

## Jen Craig

NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Lanarkshire



We're busy gearing up for lambing, with the in-bye ewes due at the beginning of April and the main hill lambing shortly after.

Both lots have scanned well and the ewes are in good condition, so I'm just hoping mother nature is kind to us and we get some grass growth soon. Four years ago we decided to start selling all lambs as stores, given the limited grass growth we have. It makes more sense to keep the grass for ewes. We were bringing lambs inside and feeding them in a wet backend and it just wasn't financially viable.

We also phased out the crossbred ewes in the field and replaced them with surplus Blackies from the hill. They are all now crossed with the North Country Cheviot. Taking the native-breed route with the field ewes was a good decision. Not only can they lamb outside, with little assistance and lower inputs, crossing with the Cheviot gives us a store lamb that is easier to sell.

The Blackface hill ewes are predominately tupped pure. Those scanned with twins are moved into the fields to lamb, for easier management, and the singles are left on the hill.

Given the success with the North Country Cheviot tups, we purchased some gimmers at the Lockerbie sale in September to establish our own flock. Their lambs will be the first pure Cheviot lambs born here and I'm excited to see how it goes. The plan is to build up to 50 females and breed tups that I can use at home to reduce the number we're buying in.



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