

SHEEPFARMER

JUNE / JULY 2021

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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RECENT ACTIVITY TO ADDRESS ISSUE OF DOG ATTACKS

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DELIVERY IS FREE TO AN AREA NEAR YOU

We're all in a vital race for survival

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

History wasn't my top subject at school – I blame it on the teaching. But I have a hunch there have been few times in our past when just surviving wasn't a priority.

War, disease, hunger, extreme weather – few generations can have ever felt truly at ease. Today's world is still full of threats. The greatest, and arguably able to impact on all the areas listed above, is climate change.

While food production often feels taken for granted, we are all expected to be more 'climate friendly'. The way we use land is under the spotlight and we're under increasing pressure to do more to aid the recovery of nature.

With Glasgow hosting the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in July 2021, the Prime Minister has renewed the UK's commitment to reducing emissions, challenging industry to reduce its carbon footprint by 75% by 2030.

The agricultural industry has signed up to being net zero by 2040, and that target looks increasingly possible if you consider reductions in emissions, renewable energy production on farms and carbon sequestration. We could do even better and be carbon negative, becoming a solution against climate change rather than contributing to it.

Sequestration

What we can achieve will depend on what we can measure. There has to be acceptance of the global warming potential calculation, which shows methane has a short life span, and a metric must be found for highly variable soil types in relation to carbon sequestration.

There is plenty sheep farmers can do to reduce their footprint without having to measure much at all while, at the same time, also improving profitability. Good nutrition, based as much as possible on forage and grazing, and reducing losses through good health and parasite management, are good examples. And that's before we look into good soil and habitat management or investing in renewables. Apart from agreeing the metrics, there seems to be little argument

about the importance and value of positive climate change measures. It really is a win win.

For nature recovery there is more of a battle going on. It's too simplistic to say it comes down to 'land sharing' (integrating productivity and nature) or 'land sparing' (farming like fury on some areas and giving others over to nature). Sheep farming predominantly shares productivity with nature and a host of other public goods. But even then land is often given over, to woodlands, ponds and wetlands.

Nature recovery

The curlew, lapwing, skylark, swallow, barn owl and pipistrelle bat all thrive on farming activity. Many mammals and insects depend on farming and livestock too, and the earthworm heads up an army of soil life that may not exist only in farmland, but goes hand in hand with good agricultural practice.

The rewilding movement has a different view on nature and has managed to alienate much of the farming community due to extreme and radical views – often linked to veganism. But increasingly even it accepts we need to eat and produce food, and realise the folly of offshoring food production or producing food in laboratories.

So the middle ground for farming seems to be around a descriptor of 'regenerative agriculture'. It's an approach not easy to define but one, if we could get beyond yet another soundbite, many farmers and environmentalists may even agree on.

The value of biodiversity is beyond question and there is no reason why diversity in agriculture should be seen as different. And it's why we are still working hard to get British Heritage Sheep off the ground. So I'm delighted this issue includes a supplement showcasing many of Britain's finest sheep breeds.

Big or small, as long as they focus on their practical traits and improving quality, they all have an important role to play in our industry.

This magazine is yet another bumper issue and we are grateful to the support and enthusiasm of all our contributors and advertisers. It's a magazine created by enthusiasts for enthusiasts – a vital characteristic that will make our survival a reality.



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NSA announces new Vice President

Having come to the end of a successful NSA Chairmanship at the beginning of the year, North Devon-based sheep farmer **Bryan Griffiths** has now been announced as a new NSA Vice President.

Bryan was invited to become a Vice President in recognition of the hard work and commitment he has shown to both NSA and the wider sheep industry. He comments: "It is an honour and privilege to be invited to take on this role. I am looking forward to continued involvement in the organisation for many years to come."

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "Bryan has been a loyal and valued supporter of NSA for many years. His longstanding involvement in NSA South West Region, involvement with NSA English Committee, NSA Sheep Event and, more recently, as NSA Chairman, has seen his enthusiasm for the UK sheep sector drive his work to make a difference. It is only right this is recognised with his being invited to serve as one of our much-appreciated Vice Presidents." *A list of all serving NSA Vice Presidents can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about.*



Bryan & Liz Griffiths.

Correction on helmet discount

NSA members interested in claiming a 10% discount on ATV helmets from Dalton's ATV, as advertised in the April/May edition of NSA Sheep Farmer magazine, may have experienced difficulty in claiming the discount. Both NSA and Dalton's ATV apologise for any inconvenience.

NSA is pleased to report the error has now been fixed and members can claim their discount using the code 'NSA10' on the Dalton's ATV website. This code will be active until 31st July 2021.

First winner of Solway giveaway named

Joint NSA members **Andrew and Matthew Tomkins** are the lucky recipients of a new Solway lamb adopter after being selected as the first recipients of 2021's NSA membership prize giveaway.

Father-and-son team Andrew and Matthew farm 300 acres of upland just outside Longtown, Cumbria. They run a flock of 300 Llanwenog (pictured) and Llanwenog cross Berrichon ewes, plus a small pedigree flock of Oxford Down and a herd of pedigree Beef Shorthorn cattle. The farm has an on-site butchery, online sales and catering business, trading as Hallsford Farm Produce.



Matthew says: "We were surprised to hear we were winners because we had only recently joined NSA. But, of course, we are very pleased with the news. We joined NSA as we believe it is one of the farming organisations that's having a really positive impact on agriculture. We have been impressed by how forward thinking and progressive it is."

There are now three further chances for new NSA members to win a lamb adopter or lamb warming box and sheep pens, kindly donated by Solway Recycling as part of the 2021 membership prize giveaway. Existing NSA members also have the chance to win by recommending a friend, family member or neighbour to sign up. *Find out more at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.*

Sheep Breeders Round Table bookings open

As an online-only event this year, bookings are already open for the six webinars that will replace the usual face-to-face Sheep Breeders Round Table this autumn.

NSA is supporting the five-day event from Monday 5th November, which has great content throughout the week. Attendance is free and can be booked online, where there are also details of the 2022 event dates, when the conference will return to its usual format. *More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrt.*

Covid-19 continues to impact shearing

Covid-19 travel restrictions mean a repeat of last year's issues with overseas shearers coming to the UK.

While many flocks have already been shorn, NSA reminds members clipping later to book shearers well in advance and use the NAAC Register of Shearers if needed. The register to be accompanied by a Covid-19 checklist. *Visit www.naac.co.uk/shearing-register.*



Notice is hereby given that the 128th Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association will be held at the Sheep Centre, Blackmore Park Road, Malvern, WR13 6PH, on Thursday 12th August at 10am, and via internet video link for those wishing to join proceedings online. The agenda will be:

- To transact the following business:
 - To approve the Minutes of the 127th Annual General Meeting.
- To receive:
 - The Trustees Report to year ended 31st December 2020.
 - The Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2020.
 - And adopt (2) and (3) above.
- To elect:
 - Officers for the ensuing year; President and Honorary Treasurer
 - Vice-President(s)
- To appoint:
 - Auditors.
- By order of the Board.

Members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form or to appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by post or by attaching a signed scanned copy by email no later than 10am on Wednesday 11th August 2021. *For full details on the use and completion, and to access proxy forms, please visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or call NSA Head Office.*

NSA regional reports



Plans are under way for the early NSA ram sales.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

To mark what would have NSA Welsh Sheep, ourselves and HCC arranged a webinar called 'Sheep farming the Welsh way - meeting the challenge of sustainability' in May.

The webinar was chaired by NSA Regional Chairman Kate Hovers with speaker John Richards from HCC presenting the levy board's document 'The Welsh Way' (a copy of which can be found on the HCC website).

Marc Jones, a farmer from near Welshpool, also spoke at the webinar about how sustainability can enhance the farming system. Marc operates a system with little or no concentrates and works to improve his grassland management with the use of herbal leys and fodder beet.

Joining the discussion, NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker said sheep farmers needed a more multi-functional approach. He suggested producers would be able to overcome budgetary constraints to play to their strengths and meet the challenge of sustainability. We thank HCC and Marc for taking part in the webinar, a recording of which can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

The regional committee is also grateful to the Owen family, who provided some videos showing NSA Welsh Sheep 2023 host farm Red House in all its glory. And we look forward to visiting the farm on Tuesday 16th May 2023.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is running a photography competition for 21-year-olds and under to disprove (or prove) the myth about the intelligence of sheep, exploring the theme 'This sheep farming life in Wales'.

The theme is open to personal interpretation, with any photographs showing the wonder of sheep and sheep farming accepted. The only requirement is entries are accompanied with a short description about yourself, your sheep (or, if you have no sheep, the sheep you would like) and your own judgement on their intelligence. The top two entries will win prizes including free NSA membership for a year and a choice between two excellent sheep health publications. *Entries close Friday 25th June and more details are available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.*

NSA Cymru/Wales Region hosted a webinar in May on 'Sheep farming the Welsh way'.

NSA Eastern Region

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

Usually June is the month, every other year, when NSA Eastern Region holds the Next Generation and Young Shepherd's event at Godolphin Stud in Newmarket, Suffolk, courtesy of the Godolphin Management Company.

Unfortunately we had to cancel it this year, but will be hosting an alternative event to the Young Shepherd Competition. We will inform the region of this when we can. This also applies to the region's farm walk. Hopefully it will all be clearer after 21st June.

The region's first ram sale will take place at Rugby Market, Stoneleigh, on Friday 21st August. This is a successful sale for both buyers and sellers and it has increased in popularity during the past few years, with this year marking its 13th anniversary. Rugby Market auctioneer Tom Wrench says the sale is always successful, with purchasers returning year on year to buy inspected quality rams that, in turn, produce quality progeny, many returning to the market as prime lambs.

With the prices for early lambs being as high as they have been this year, we believe the demand for rams at the sale will be higher than in previous years. Many producers who buy and sell at Rugby are keen to produce more early lambs for this early market. The region's second sale is held at Melton Mowbray Market on Friday 17th September. This sale is well established and firmly marked on many ram purchasers' calendars. It offers a sale of quality inspected rams. *Details of all NSA ram sales on page 9.*

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

Plans are underway for our regional heat of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd's competition, to be held in conjunction with the Southern Shears competition on Saturday 17th July.

This will be kindly hosted by Ed Gingell, the so-called Lewis Hamilton of the shearing world, at Copford Sawmill, Dern Lane, Heathfield, East Sussex, TN22 0PN. We eagerly anticipate our first face-to-face event and welcome entries from young shepherds aged 26 years and under on 27th July 2022. With a prize fund of £500 to compete for, as well as a chance to watch world-class shearing, it promises to be an exciting day out.

Dates have been finalised for our popular biennial Sheep Health, Wealth and Production Conference. Virtual events will be held on the evenings of Tuesday 26th, Wednesday 27th and Thursday 28th October 2021, and will include speakers on health planning, grazing management and how to attract and retain the next generation.

Our Chairman, Yann Le Du, is in touch with hosts and sponsors for the Technical Field Days, which were originally planned for 2020, with a view to holding four days across the region in September 2021. *Keep an eye on the Weekly Email Update and NSA website for more information.*

NSA Scottish Region

Grace Reid, Regional Co-ordinator

The next NSA Scottish Region Committee Meeting will be held as this magazine arrives with members, to review various topics relating to the announcements of a newly-formed Scottish Government.

This will also include a discussion on the recent webinar hosted by NSA Scottish Region, which provided an opportunity for farmers and crofters to share concerns about the release of lynx. A recording of this can be viewed on the NSA Scottish Region website under the news section.

It is hoped future meetings may allow for face-to-face gatherings, but a hybrid option is currently being investigated due to the geographical size of the region.

A reminder that NSA Scot Sheep, postponed from 2020 and 2021, will take place on the new date of Wednesday 1st June 2022, by kind permission of Robert and Hazel McNee, Over Finlary Farm, Tealing, Dundee.

NSA Scottish Region looks forward to welcoming all members, exhibitors, sponsors and interested parties to the event next year. Further information will be released later this year. *Visit the NSA Scottish Region website at www.nscotland.org.*



NSA Marches and NSA South Eastern region will both be hosting Next Generation Shepherds training and competition days in July.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Secretary

With the demands of lambing now finished, and lockdown restrictions continuing to ease, NSA Marches Region has been pleased to pick up plans for its regional Next Generation training and competition day this summer.

The event will be held on Sunday 4th July from 10.30am, by kind permission of event hosts Overbury Estate, based near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, GL20 7PH.

The day is an excellent opportunity for the younger generation of sheep farmers, or those considering shepherding as a future career, to come along and view demonstrations of shepherding tasks. If they choose they can also take part in the Next Generation Shepherd of the Year regional heat, for a chance to qualify for the national finals at NSA Sheep Event at the Three Counties Showground in July 2022. The competition will offer entrants the chance to win generous cash and other prizes.

Interested potential competitors, aged 26 years and under on the 27th July 2022 (the date of the competition finals next year), are encouraged to pre-register with NSA Marches Region Secretary Katie James before the end of June. *Katie's contact details can be found on page 2.*

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.

NSA Breed Society Forum returns after absence

After an enforced absence in 2020, this year's NSA Breed Society Forum took place in early May and moved online for the first time in the event's history.

Attendees from NSA-affiliated breed societies were given updates on activities, membership and NSA policy work, alongside an overview on the Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme (PSHGS) and an update on export certification.

With the continuing restrictions resulting in the various regional events for 2021 being cancelled, Chris Adamson, NSA Activities and Campaigns Officer, was able to provide something to look forward to with diary dates, including NSA Sheep at Malvern on Wednesday 27th July, 2022.

Following updates on NSA activity from Operations Director Joanne Briggs and Policy & Technical Officer Sean Riches, including information on NSA's ongoing work calling for a national gene bank to protect the diversity of the UK's native sheep breeds, the online audience

returned after a short lunch break for interesting presentations on future schemes to affect the UK sheep sector.

Opening the afternoon session, NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker discussed trade, policies and the agriculture transition plan – all set to shape the future trading situation for the next era – as well as giving an update on ELMS and the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI).

Vision

Phil wrapped up his session, with a vision of what he believes the future might look like, saying: "We can expect high standards and high-quality products being produced, and also quality in other outcomes such as the environmental footprint, carbon footprint and general protection of the planet, which is financially appropriate."

"I believe we can maintain sheep numbers in the UK, and perhaps understand how to make the traditional stratified sheep production systems work to deliver future objectives."

Guest speaker Alison Braddock, from SRUC Veterinary Services, provided information on

the PSGHS before Marcus Bates from Export Certificate Ltd and Rob Grinnall from UKTAG joined the forum to speak about how the two organisations, with two different roles, are working together to achieve the UK's export ambitions.

Rob gave an update on recent work, including responding to the live-animal-export consultations and amendments to Export Health Certificates, describing how much behind the scenes is ongoing to link government departments, as well as countries outside the UK.

Marcus spoke about the building of a web platform to allow companies to exhibit in the absence of face-to-face events, which will continue to be useful when trade shows restart. He also introduced a recently produced capability document for UK livestock breeding and genetics, shortly to be digitised and made available online.

Breed societies and NSA members who missed this year's forum will find both sessions available to view again online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars. A detailed event report can also be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports.



Feedback suggests an increase in sheep worrying due to Covid-19 lockdowns.

#LeadOn campaign attracts good coverage

In a concerted effort to help sheep farmers deal with incidents of sheep worrying, and to highlight the seriousness of the issue to the general public, NSA ran an extended two-week sheep worrying by dogs campaign in May.

This year's campaign was titled using the hashtag #LeadOn, a name aimed at reminding dog owners to be responsible and act as an example to others by keeping their pets on leads in the presence of livestock. The two-week combination of publicity and online events successfully attracted interest from a wide range of national broadcasters and press, including BBC Breakfast, ITV's Good Morning Britain and the Times, as well as numerous regional television and radio programmes and newspapers. The increased interest in the campaign brings hope that the general public may finally be waking up to the seriousness of this devastating issue.

Coverage

With the campaign's coverage, coupled with the recent announcement of a commitment for long awaited change to legislation surrounding the issue, NSA hopes an increase in awareness and understanding by dog owners on the seriousness of the problem could finally be achieved.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "NSA has worked tirelessly for many years to raise awareness of sheep worrying by dogs. Part of this has been efforts to achieve a change in legislation in England and Wales to protect sheep

farmers more effectively from dog attacks. This year's campaign has really caught the attention of the media and we are, of course, grateful to have had this platform from which to share our important messages.

"NSA was pleased to welcome the announcement in the Queen's speech in May that the police are to be given new powers to respond more effectively to the most serious incidents of sheep worrying. Following the recent acceptance of the new legislation in Scotland, which sees dog owners facing fines of up to £40,000 and possible prison sentences for the most serious of offences, we hope the UK will soon be an equal playing field for legislation on this matter."

Involved

A highlight of this year's campaign was the NSA Breakfast Club webinar and the three interactive workshops offering interested parties the opportunity to get further involved in discussion on methods to try and reduce sheep worrying attacks from occurring, as well as giving valuable advice on how to react and what to do if an attack does happen.

NSA welcomed some well-known faces from social media to take part in these webinars, who are well placed to spread the message from the campaign to a far reaching audience. This included Zoe Colville, aka The Chief Shepherdess, who has more than 30,000 followers on Facebook and Instagram, many of whom are from non-farming backgrounds. Recordings of all webinars and workshops are now available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

"For many years NSA has run a one-week campaign each spring, alongside its year-round

work to tackle this problem," adds Mr Stocker. "But the decision this year to extend the campaign to two weeks has, I believe, resulted in a far greater reach and success in sharing the important messaging about the responsible dog ownership needed to protect sheep flocks.

"Although we are pleased with the success of #LeadOn, we are under no illusion our work on this issue is done. NSA is committed to ensuring the general public develops a better understanding of the stress and suffering any dog, no matter its breed, can cause to sheep by barking, chasing and attacking them. And we will continue until this issue is far better acknowledged and incidents are greatly reduced."

More information on sheep worrying by dogs can be found at www.sheepworrying.org.uk.



Survey results confirm suspected increase in cases

#LeadOn began with the launch of NSA's sheep worrying by dogs survey results, which revealed a concerning increase in cases of sheep worrying by dogs during the past year.

More than two thirds of the UK's sheep farmers responding to the survey experienced an increase in attacks, with each farmer, on average, experiencing seven separate incidents during the past year and typically resulting in five sheep injured and two sheep killed per attack.

Estimated financial losses through incidents of sheep worrying of up to £50,000 were recorded, with an average cost across all respondents of

£1,570. But most respondents received no or very little compensation.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "NSA's own survey results, combined with recently reported figures from industry partners, show a concerning increase in the number of sheep worrying by dogs cases during the past year. There is much evidence suggesting this is a result of the various periods of national lockdown, a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with dog ownership increasing and the general public enjoying more time in the countryside, as this is one of the few outdoor pursuits people are still able to enjoy."

But worryingly, in addition to the threat to animal welfare and the farmer's income, perhaps



the most concerning finding to be taken from the survey was the effect the issue is having on the mental wellbeing of the country's sheep farmers. Farmers completing the survey reported feelings of anxiety, anger, stress and frustration as a result of sheep worrying by dog attacks, with more than half recognising it was causing a moderate to severe impact on their mental health.

A full summary of NSA's survey results can be found on the NSA website at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/surveyresults, as well as a number of new case studies on sheep farmers across the UK.

NSA Breakfast Clubs – food for thought for the rest of the day



NSA Breakfast Clubs returned in April with an informative discussion on the role of permanent pasture before the #LeadOn sheep worrying by dogs webinar informed an online audience in May.

April

As an area of significant debate, the content of April's NSA's Breakfast Club was thought provoking, educational and covered a number of key topics including: grass feeding benefits on the health of grazing animals; the health of people who eat products from these animals; and the health of the environment. But with a wide range of farmed permanent pastures it is wrong to assume they are all delivering the same values, and the NSA Breakfast Club discussed the options available to support decision making on a farm-by-farm basis.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region committee member John Lloyd chaired the session, with well-known speakers and panellists, including Aurelie Aubry, Robin Pakeman and Prysor Williams, all providing interesting information.

Independent sheep adviser Liz Genever opened discussion with her thoughts on the benefits of

permanent pasture and also highlighted some areas where, in her words 'it doesn't do so well'. She reminded the audience that, with roughly 40% of the UK's pasture being permanent and a disproportionate amount of this in areas focused on sheep and beef production, it is an important part of those production systems.

Lisa Norton, an ecologist at Lancaster's Centre for Ecology & Hydrology with an interest in how permanent pasture can be beneficially managed from both an ecological and agricultural perspective, followed by reiterating how grasslands are, and have been for many years, a key part of our landscape. She continued by stressing how soils in pastures play an important role, in absorbing and filtering water, improving water quality, and reducing flooding, as well as cycling nutrients and storing carbon on a large scale.

May

As part of NSA's two-week-long sheep worrying by dogs campaign this year (see opposite page) the #LeadOn Breakfast Club webinar in May engaged attendees with a summary of NSA's 2021 Sheep Worrying Survey results. This set the scene for a discussion on current legislation and the potential for change.

The session was chaired by Neil Parish MP,

who has campaigned for more to be done about this serious issue. NSA also welcomed Marisa Heath of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, speaking about the potential for legislation changes in England and Wales within ongoing work to address the issue.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker presented a breakdown of the NSA survey results before Grace Reid, NSA Scottish Region Coordinator, gave an overview on the recent changes to Scottish legislation, resulting in more powers to the police, increased fines and prison sentences.

To round up the talks, Marisa Heath gave an overview of where improvements can be made to assert responsible dog ownership, including better information when making a choice of dog and guidance on dog training, with greater emphasis on ensuring dogs are properly microchipped and the data updated appropriately to record changes in ownership.

Next up for fans of the NSA Breakfast Club is what promises to be a further interesting discussion, looking at the balance between farm productivity and environmental objectives.

This webinar, to be held in early June, will be available, as with all other NSA webinars, at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

Policy update

By Sean Riches, NSA

Work to resolve post-Brexit trade issues continues

The impacts of Brexit are still evident – including lower export volumes compared to 2020, unresolved issues created by the Northern Ireland protocol, no immediate prospect of exporting live breeding animals to the EU, and the push to complete other trade negotiations.

Some focus has turned to the imminent changes to farm support schemes, along with wider environmental, climate change and nature recovery initiatives.

Much of today's farming in the UK has been shaped by nearly 50 years of EU policy and the Common Agricultural Policy. But the future vision could, with the right approach and Ministerial commitment, offer new and positive ways of working. NSA also welcomes the announcement of the consultation on the proposed Lump Sum Payment Exit Scheme and the delinking of payments as another step towards developing clarity about the new Future Farming schemes and what will replace BPS as it is phased out. While this consultation frames some of Defra's thinking, we will have to wait until October for final details.

At the time of writing there has been talk of a change to the Northern Ireland protocol to address the issues of moving sheep. However with new DUP leadership, it may take some time to see change and understand what it means. Through its involvement in the Livestock Chain Advisory Group, NSA is staying close to developments and is working with DAERA and Defra to keep this front of mind and push for improvements as a matter of urgency.



Photo credit: Philippe Alès / Wikimedia Commons

Animal movements continue to raise concerns beyond the GB-NI issues, with still no confirmation of 'live' Border Control Posts (BCP) being established on mainland Europe. Until a BCP with facilities to handle live animals is available on the EU side, it is not possible to export live sheep.

Certificates

NSA has learnt the application submitted by Qualivia for a BCP near Calais has progressed. But with investment required to fit the site with the necessary ironwork, pens, gates and other facilities, the date by when it will become operational is unclear. The facilities for importing livestock into the UK from the EU are in place, but NSA has learned of some difficulties with the requisite Export Health Certificates. These are causing delays in certain EU member states. NSA continues to highlight these issues and, with the signing of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, expects to see improvements in the not-too-distant future.

Despite the strong protests of many agricultural organisations, including NSA, a trade deal was offered to Australia in May, with the likelihood of reaching an agreement early in June. In a letter to Victoria Prentis MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State) it was pointed out how, with a significant difference in terms of animal health and welfare and environmental standards, the threat of undermining British farmers was now a reality. NSA stressed how this was a dangerous precedent and will continue to press for a commitment to upholding our standards in further deals on the horizon, including New Zealand, Canada, Brazil, Mexico and the US.

continue to press for the UK to be on a level playing field for legislation.

Included in the action plan is an outline of how livestock farmers will be financially supported, through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, as part of the Future Farming Programme. Planned for launch in 2022, it gives the opportunity for something we all want to see – improved animal health and well-being, improved productivity and efficient resource use, with less reliance on financial support, but integrated with environmental gains and enhancements.

Clarity

The aspiration is good, but there will be challenges and clarity is still sought on exactly what support will look like for health and welfare enhancements that are valued by the public. Many of the UK's sheep farmers are already practising a regenerative-farming approach and working in harmony with nature, producing sustainable and high-quality products that should be rewarded accordingly.



Work will continue to raise awareness of sheep worrying by dogs.

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

NSA Eastern Region Melton Sale
Friday 17th September – Melton Mowbray Market

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

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



The Queen's Speech

The Queen's Speech offered a number of proposals for improvements in legislation to support the protection of animal health and welfare.

The launch of the Action Plan for Animal Welfare sets out the aims and ambitions to shape the manner in which animals are treated both at home and abroad. Particularly welcomed by NSA are the proposals for new powers to be made available to the police in England and Wales to deal with livestock worrying.

This is an area NSA has focused on and it continues to work tirelessly to achieve a change in legislation protecting sheep farmers – or rather their flocks – more effectively from dog attacks. NSA's 2021 #LeadOn campaign saw great support from farmers, members of the public, industry bodies, and veterinary practices across the UK and the media.

Following the acceptance of the Bill in Scotland earlier this year, which sees dog owners facing fines of up to £40,000 and possible prison sentences, NSA will use the increased awareness and high profile from #LeadOn to

Environmental initiatives for the future

NSA sees the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot, as well as the development of future farming schemes, as a positive approach and welcomes the decision to offer the SFI pilot to all those who expressed an interest.

The idea of offering just a small number of standards, to run alongside a Simplified Countryside Stewardship Scheme, seems to make sense, so long as the core stewardship scheme is attractive and becomes more appealing.

But there continue to be concerns raised with Defra by NSA, where unenclosed grassland standards are not being piloted in this phase and the planned SFI roll out in 2022 will not offer anything for upland farmers on unenclosed land or commons. This suggests many upland farmers will now see declining BPS payments but with no obvious way to replace this income. NSA has requested Defra works with all stakeholders to identify viable and suitable options for these upland farmers to be able to engage in alternative schemes to replace decreasing BPS.

Defra has given foresight of a number of schemes and initiatives within the Environment Bill, including measures to integrate new agricultural polices with environmentally sustainable activities, local nature recovery and landscape recovery. The potential opportunities presented by the Nature Recovery Plan are welcomed by NSA, as the ambition is to reward the way sheep farmers can continue to produce a high-quality product, with a balanced approach to enhancing nature and managing climate change. However, the detail is still to be clarified and, as development of the schemes proceed, NSA will, through its involvement in a number of stakeholder groups, ensure any concerns and the future of sheep farming in the UK are addressed in full.

Integrating trees

Included as part of Defra's plans, the England Trees Action plan provides the means for protecting existing trees and woodland, accompanied by initiatives to increase tree planting. As has been previously documented by NSA and the Woodland Trust, trees can boost production and improve animal health and welfare while also providing wider benefits to the environment.

NSA also acknowledges woods and trees are vital habitats, as well as important for sequestering carbon, and will continue to raise awareness with the Government and its agencies, maintaining that while trees are good



for nature and climate, as well as for soil management and sheep welfare, it must be a case of the right trees in the right place for the right reason. This must also be along with the need for greater recognition of the valuable role of grasslands in environmental management and climate control.

Also included in these plans is the introduction of the England Species Reintroduction Taskforce, which will bring together various stakeholders (yet to be fully clarified) to develop an approach to recovering and restoring 'iconic' species in England. While sheep farmers enjoy a variety of wildlife on their farms, and help to create suitable habitats, achieving a satisfactory balance to minimise any threat to their livestock is a key concern. And it's one for which NSA will continue to push for. Species currently mentioned in the plan include pine martens, hen harriers, curlews, beavers, dormice, corncrake, short-haired bumblebees and large blue butterflies.

Involvement

NSA knows through experience that constant and consistent involvement is necessary to address any potential impact on businesses and livelihoods. But it is also aware decisions are sometimes beyond reach. NSA opposed the application by Wild Ken Hill Estate for a licence to release white-tailed sea eagles in Norfolk, suggesting focus should remain on the Isle of Wight population to fully understand the outcomes before another release. But despite the concerns raised by farming organisations, local farmers and landowners, the licence was recently granted. Natural England reportedly examined data from elsewhere in Europe ahead of this decision, but it is not clear it took into consideration reports closer to home, such as Scotland, where there have been repeated calls for an action plan to control the birds, which have come to see lambs as a food source.

While NSA does not agree with this licensing decision, it is committed to working constructively with Wild Ken Hill's project team with the aim of enabling it to be successful – part of which will be measured by no negative impact on sheep farmers legitimate business activities. Furthermore, NSA asks that an exit plan is documented, which specifies what actions should be taken if concerns become reality – as has been reported in Scotland.

A balanced approach is required to enhance nature and mitigate climate change.



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

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Minister of Agriculture Edwin Poots, and now recently elected DUP leader, has announced the sheep industry is to get financial compensation towards the dramatic fall in wool prices due to Covid-19.

Producers will be contacted in July by DAERA with a summary of their 2019 sheep inventory on which their payment will be based, and payment can be expected by late August.

NSA Northern Ireland Region now has a member on the group set up to look at the recently introduced EU Animal Health Law, which is in force in NI since mid-April but not compulsory in Great Britain. The group will watch and work to simplify any differences between the two regions to make the regulations as compatible as possible.

Priority topics

A GB/NI industry stakeholder group representing cattle and sheep is working continuously and engaging with relevant government bodies both in NI and GB, to allow a return to unrestricted trade between GB and NI. There are other less disruptive problems, like the requirement to change eartags and identities before and after movement to NI, but the priority is cattle and sheep movements from GB to NI.

The second stage reading of the Private Members Bill on Climate Change, put forward by a member of the Green Party, took place in early May with the Bill being supported. Although not opposed to reducing carbon emissions, NSA Northern Ireland Region has been and will continue to work alongside other agriculture stakeholders to get a reasonable and workable solution incorporated into this Bill, rather than the proposal of halving the livestock

population with the subsequent potential for 100,000 job losses in ancillary industries.

The Climate Change Committee (CCC) chaired by Lord Deben has recently recommended the following for Northern Ireland:

- NI to contribute fairly to UK Net Zero by 2050 target.
- But to recognise it will not meet net zero by 2050, due to our unique circumstances – mainly dominance of agriculture that produces unavoidable emissions (methane), which are more difficult to tackle.
- An 82% reduction in emissions from all of NI by 2050 is a more balanced target.

However this is still very challenging for agriculture and to meet this 82% target the CCC says the following is needed:

- NI agriculture should reduce emissions by 57% by 2050.
- To be achieved by adopting 'low carbon farming' practices, such as changes to diets, breeding for low methane, animal health improvements, increase use of anaerobic digestion, soil management and a move to low-carbon fuels in machinery.
- Transformation in land use also needed by 2050, with 46% of land use expected to move from livestock farming through changes in output and more efficient farming. Land will be released for forestry, agro-forestry, restored peatland and energy crops.

These proposals will represent huge change in Northern Ireland, but to meet net zero by 2045, as proposed in the Climate Change Bill, would be much more challenging and require significantly more from agriculture and impact on the agri-food sector and wider economy.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region looks forward to engaging with Welsh ministers

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



With the reappointment of Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Rural Affairs (now with additional responsibility for North Wales and Trefnydd), NSA Cymru/Wales Region is looking forward to continuing its ongoing dialogue with the Minister in these changing times for the sector.

This is especially true as our departure from the EU means Wales is now in a good position to design its own food and farming policy.

As we emerge from what has been a difficult 14 months, with the Covid-19 pandemic having impacted on each and every one of us, NSA is aware of the vital role the agricultural industry plays within the whole of the Welsh economy. And we are keen to reinforce this message when engaging with the Minister, to promote an industry that can grow sustainably and support the Welsh economy in its recovery.

Also noted in the Welsh Government announcement was that Julie James and Lee Waters are in new positions as Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change, respectively. We understand their portfolio will also cover agricultural land use and public access. NSA Cymru/Wales Region looks forward to engaging with this new department and is particularly mindful of the targets set for greenhouse gas emissions across the sector. These will be in the spotlight at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26), to be held in Glasgow later this year, making it more important than ever to highlight the benefits the industry can offer to helping solve this issue.

Eluned Morgan takes over the Public Health portfolio, including responsibility for the Food Standards Agency and GM foods.

Post-elections, we are waiting to see what the next steps will be following the response submitted to the Agriculture (Wales) Bill White paper consultation and will report on this in due course.

New Scottish Government represents opportunities for sheep sector

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



In the newly formed Scottish Government, our new Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands is Mairi Gougeon MSP and Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport is Michael Matheson MSP.

With a wide set of responsibilities including land use, environmental quality and natural resources, Màiri McAllan MSP will support the two Cabinet Secretaries as Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform.

In the previous Parliament, Scottish Government adopted a policy to provide people in rural businesses with as much security as possible. This included a period of stability with little change to the current system, until the end of 2020. This was to be followed by a period of simplicity, where simplifications and improvements could be made and potential new schemes for longer term policy piloted between 2021 and 2024.

Notable change

It is anticipated, with the re-election of the SNP as the new Scottish Government, the previous policy position is to be retained. But with a notable change in the Cabinet Secretary position, time will tell if this is the case and to which direction a new agricultural policy for Scotland will be headed.

Five sector-specific farmer-led groups outlined their proposals as to how to meet climate change and biodiversity goals, as part of a Scottish post-CAP rural support policy. To establish the future shape of rural support, primary legislation will be required and a new Agriculture Bill will be brought forward in this Parliamentary session to set the tone and model of support for the next decade. But a crucial component for this to happen is for the UK Government to fully respect the devolution settlement in terms of funding provision (£170m) to ensure Scotland is not worse off as a result of the EU exit.

Uncertainty ahead

Lambing experiences have varied widely from area to area and, dependent on timing, even more so due to the devastating weather conditions encountered, as well as having to deal with the many predators roaming the nation. Despite prices so far remaining high, it is uncertain what may be around the corner in 2021 and beyond.

NSA Scottish Region eagerly awaits an announcement of the findings of the Scottish Government consultation on the welfare of animals in transport, held earlier this year, and will be writing to the respective Cabinet Secretaries to ensure the Scottish sheep industry is fully represented and to address the pressing issues currently affecting our members.

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Changes in land use have led to the loss of species of flora and fauna in the UK.



Rewilding, reintroduction and ecological balance

By Sean Riches, NSA

Achieving a balance in the countryside between productivity, ecosystems, biodiversity and people opens wide ranging discussion and debate on the purpose, rights, natural processes and ecology of Britain's varied landscape.

It's a landscape shaped by generations of human activity, grazing livestock, crop production, mining, industry and manufacturing. Britain was an early innovator of industrialisation leading to significant population growth and urbanisation during the past two centuries. The population has grown from approximately 18m 200 years ago, to 40m 100 years ago, to estimates of 67m in 2020. That's a 60% increase in a century.

The UK is among the world's most urbanised countries. For every 10 people living in the UK, roughly eight live in towns. This inevitably contributed to changes to land use and its availability for agriculture. This means that although the majority of the UK is still rural (72% agricultural, 20% woodland), far fewer areas look as they did 100 or 200 years ago.

Changes in land use have led to the loss of species of flora and fauna from the UK, some through environmental conditions and some due to intentional human action. Most of this loss would have been due to necessity at the time

– to provide food and improve living conditions. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see how earlier life effected the planet and looking for ways to redress this is a necessity rather than a luxury. This also has to balance natural processes, as well as human physical and mental health and well-being, with an increasing demand for living space and sustainable, responsible food production.

'Rewilding' is a story many want to know more about, and 'reintroduction' raises expectation and anticipation of observing less common wildlife. But given their potential impact on sheep farming, NSA believes it is important to understand what they mean and how they differ.

Restoration

The definition of rewilding is to restore (an area of land) to a 'natural' state so that nature, having previously disappeared, might come back under its own steam when habitat is restored. Restoring a wetland, for example, can bring back plants, insects, birds, butterflies and mammals as part of a complex food-chain.

Reintroductions are where species, previously disappeared, will need more of a helping hand to become re-established, possibly due to changes happening in the period of absence. These species may experience different challenges compared to those that existed before, such

as more contact with humans or transport infrastructure, or even with an invasive species unintentionally (or intentionally) introduced into the wild. The conservation efforts to support UK-native red squirrels, versus the US-imported grey squirrels, are evidence of those challenges.

Searching questions need to be asked when considering rewilding landscapes or reintroducing long-gone species. How will it impact on food security, can things really be left to nature to balance, without human intervention and what happens if reintroduced species get out of control (possibly causing problems that led to their disappearance)? The answers to some questions may be straightforward, but others are more complex. Should we even attempt to reintroduce species into the UK that have not been present for centuries? Lynx have not roamed this island for more than 1,300 years, when the country was a very different place.

For some species there may be a good argument for giving nature a chance to follow natural processes to help to reduce species loss and maintain biodiversity. The pine marten population in Scotland is recovering and expanding across the English border, re-colonising areas of Northumberland and Cumbria.

But the questions remain. How should rewilding and reintroduction be guided? What yardstick can help develop strategies and



Farmers are concerned about attacks on livestock by predator species.

inform decisions? What criteria allows objective assessment of a proposal for reintroduction?

To prevent bias in the list of species to be reintroduced, the potential challenges and risks that large, charismatic mammals, particularly predators, may bring must be counter balanced with those of smaller animals and plants, which may offer a greater chance of success and result in a richer diversity.

The UK is a nation of animal lovers and was the first country in the world to pass legislation to protect animals. And these standards we set need to be the benchmark against which any proposal is measured, perhaps using the 'five freedoms' concept. The five freedoms are considered aspirational, as they cannot always be achieved and maintained, but it should always be the aim to provide them, as far as possible, to all animals, both domestic and wild, no matter where they are in the food chain.

Predators

Providing food and water may be straightforward in many cases but for those further up the food chain, particularly apex predators, it can be more difficult. So a detailed understanding of territory size and prey availability must be assessed, bearing in mind that prey species often adapt to the presence of a predator and change their behaviour.

With so much change in the UK landscape, providing an appropriate environment that truly represents a suitable habitat to offer adequate shelter and protection, may be easier for some species than others.

For some space to support a viable population and maintain genetic viability may not be a limiting factor. The cirl bunting is a good example of what can be done in South Devon. For others, like the Eurasian lynx, the available geography

will be restrictive. A territory size resulting in insufficient genetic diversity could be a problem and there could also be an impact on other land users, such as sheep farmers, who have every right to go about their legitimate business, as well as negative impacts on wildlife dependent on existing land use. Then there are likely problems with livestock attacks and subsequent animal welfare.

Reintroductions in the UK and further abroad show not all species thrive if placed back in a previous environment. This can be for several reasons, including the risk of disease or injury. We are seeing more exotic diseases, both animal and human, in the UK than we have in the past, and there are more roads, faster cars and trains. There are few roads without roadkill in the verges.

A major claim made by rewilding and reintroduction proposals is increased economic benefits of tourism. The reality is uncertain.

Lynx are notoriously nocturnal and secretive and unlikely to be seen. But a sighting could lead to an influx of people into already crowded areas of beautiful countryside. Farming and food production already has a resilient economy and, as has been seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, over reliance on tourism can be problematic.

Finally the introduction of some species, mostly of the higher predators but also animals like beavers, will change the ecological structure of the countryside as it now exists – and has existed for the past 100 or 200 years. This then leads to fear and distress not only in local wildlife prey

populations, but also potentially in livestock and pets. And the likely increased contact with humans being inquisitive, and also looking to protect livelihoods and businesses, may heighten fear and distress in any new species introduced.

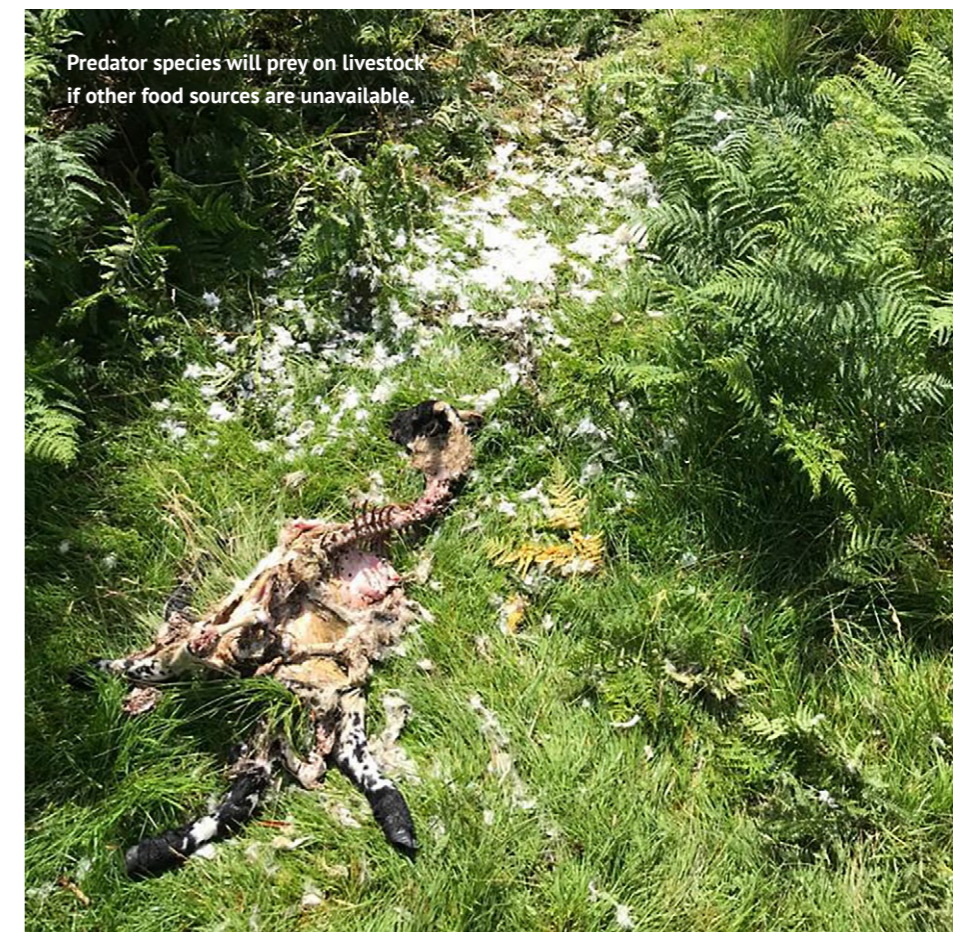
Proposals

NSA takes a balanced view and supports, where appropriate, all rewilding and reintroduction proposals and further maintains, for any initiative altering the ecological structure and natural processes, that there must be robust decision-making process based on thorough impact assessments developed with the input of all stakeholders.

NSA welcomes Defra's recently launched code and guidance for reintroductions for England as a step in the right direction and looks forward to engaging with the proposed Task Force to consider impacts on farmers.

There should be careful plans made both for introduction and for exit, should things not turn out as expected. And where there are financial implications, appropriate compensation must be made available to support any damage to livelihoods. NSA believes all reintroductions must address, with clarity, the likely difficulties encountered, including minimum population, genetic diversity, home-range area and food availability. These must all be accurately balanced against the risks to human life, livelihoods, and other wildlife.

More analysis on pages 16-18.



Predator species will prey on livestock if other food sources are unavailable.



Lynx's prey includes species ranging from rabbits through to small deer.

Photo: © Jon Glittenberg / Wikimedia Commons

Could lynx thrive in the UK?

The concept of reintroducing lynx has again been raised, ignoring the decision in 2018 when an application from the Lynx UK Trust to reintroduce the wildcats to Kielder Forest in Northumberland was rejected by the then Defra Secretary Michael Gove on the advice of Natural England.

Lynx disappeared from the UK landscape more than 1,300 years ago, mainly due to a decrease in forest area and increased human pressure. Since then further decreases in forests have occurred, reducing again any areas that might have been suitable. Lynx are listed as a species of 'least concern' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, due to its large extensive range across Europe, Russia and Asia. So it begs the question, what is the benefit to the species of trying to reintroduce it into an area no longer capable of supporting it and compromising its five freedoms?

Starvation

Previous reintroductions of lynx across Europe during the past 40 years have not all been successful and, in fact, a high number of those released died either from malnutrition, starvation or disease. Some sites were just too small to support a viable population. Those areas where animals did appear to survive better was due, in part, to preying on livestock, leading to the belief that lynx are poor colonisers, particularly where connectivity between habitats is not suitable or there are significant obstacles such as roads. Some of these animals ended up being recaptured.

NSA believes Britain would not be a suitable location for the proposed reintroduction of lynx

as it cannot accommodate the size of population required. Small populations, which are restricted geographically, are highly vulnerable due to low genetic diversity and an inability to maintain a minimum viable population. The hunting area of a single Eurasian lynx can be up to 450km² and, to put that in perspective, Kielder forest covers 650km².

Lynx's prey include a variety of species, ranging from small mammals such as rabbits and hares up to small deer. They also eat birds, such as grouse and nesting waders, will feed on carrion and anything else that is available and



Lynx disappeared from the UK landscape more than 1,300 years ago.

vulnerable. They are opportunistic and, where both domestic and wild prey is available to them, the relation between prey and predator becomes much less predictable. Evidence in a Norwegian study in 2014 showed sheep made up most of the lynx's diet during the summer when they were readily available. As there is currently a move towards later outdoor lambing in the UK, as a method of improving resource efficiency, this temporally variable diet could be problematic. Sheep are arguably slower and less agile than deer, making them much easier prey.

Deer Control

It is unlikely lynx would be able to reduce the deer population enough to contribute towards sufficient woodland regeneration. The species of deer causing the most damage to woodland in Scotland, which is arguably the most suitable potential area for lynx reintroduction due to its size, is red deer. These deer are not typically preyed on by Eurasian lynx and live on open hillside, while the greater and increasing deer populations are seen in south and east England.

NSA is concerned by the lack of thought given to controlling a reintroduced lynx population, or that its initial protected-species status would be a permanent feature regardless of how big individual populations may grow. As seen in the cases of ravens, badgers and, more recently, white-tailed sea eagles in Scotland, once a species has protected status it does not become 'unprotected' when numbers are high and problems are being caused. There are examples where maintaining protection is necessary. Without a robust scheme in place the re-establishment of a few small osprey populations in some parts of the UK, for example, would not have been successful.

Sea eagles versus sheep

Once widespread across the UK, the last recording of a known breeding pair of white-tailed sea eagles prior to the 20th century was as far back as 1780. Their decline was mainly due to habitat change and human pressure. Attempts were made in 1959 and 1968 to reintroduce them, but proved to be unsuccessful.

However they were successfully re-established on the west coast of Scotland in 1975 and 1985, thought to be the first successful reintroduction of a nationally extinct species in the 20th century. In 2007, further sea eagles were introduced to Scotland's east coast. In 2019, licences were given for the release of 60 sea eagles during a five-year period on the Isle of Wight and, finally, in 2021 a licence was granted for 60 birds to be released in Norfolk, during a 10-year period, with the aim of establishing a breeding population between 2026 and 2029.

Concerns

The decision by Natural England to grant a licence for the Norfolk release has come as no surprise, despite the concerns raised by farming organisations, local farmers and landowners during the consultation period. What was of particular concern was how Natural England examined data from elsewhere in Europe, but did not take into consideration reports closer to home, such as Scotland, where there have been repeated calls for an action plan to control the birds, which have come to see lambs as a food source.

The UK has more sheep than any other country populated by white-tailed sea eagles, as well as different farming systems and husbandry practices, meaning the figures from other countries are not directly transferrable to the UK. Additionally, Natural England ignored requests to focus on and monitor how the Isle of Wight population (released in 2019/20) are behaving to be able to understand the outcomes before going ahead with another release.

In areas where there is a lack of prey, some farmers in Scotland report losing 20-30 lambs each season due to attacks on ewes and lambs by the birds. One Scottish Natural Heritage monitor farm has demonstrated the loss of an extra 181 lambs between 2012 and 2018. Post-mortem examinations of a small sample of lambs killed by the eagles found most to have been fit and healthy when attacked, rather than dead or unviable lambs, as some had originally believed.

In Scotland it was expected, following stakeholder discussions, for there to be careful management of the population to ensure a balanced sustainable environment for farming practices and the reintroduction to co-exist. This would ensure animal welfare on both sides is maintained. But this has not happened and in some areas the population density is too high for the natural food sources available and, with no permissible control measures in place, this has increased the level of lamb predation.

NSA is actively involved in the groups overseeing the Isle of Wight sea eagle release



Losses of 20 to 30 lambs each season have been reported by Scottish farmers.

and there is no doubt the team there has learnt from some of the failures of the release in Scotland. They have not fed them in a way that might encourage them into sheep fields, and they understand that if the birds are to succeed they must learn to live alongside people, rather than people having to be restricted to live alongside them.

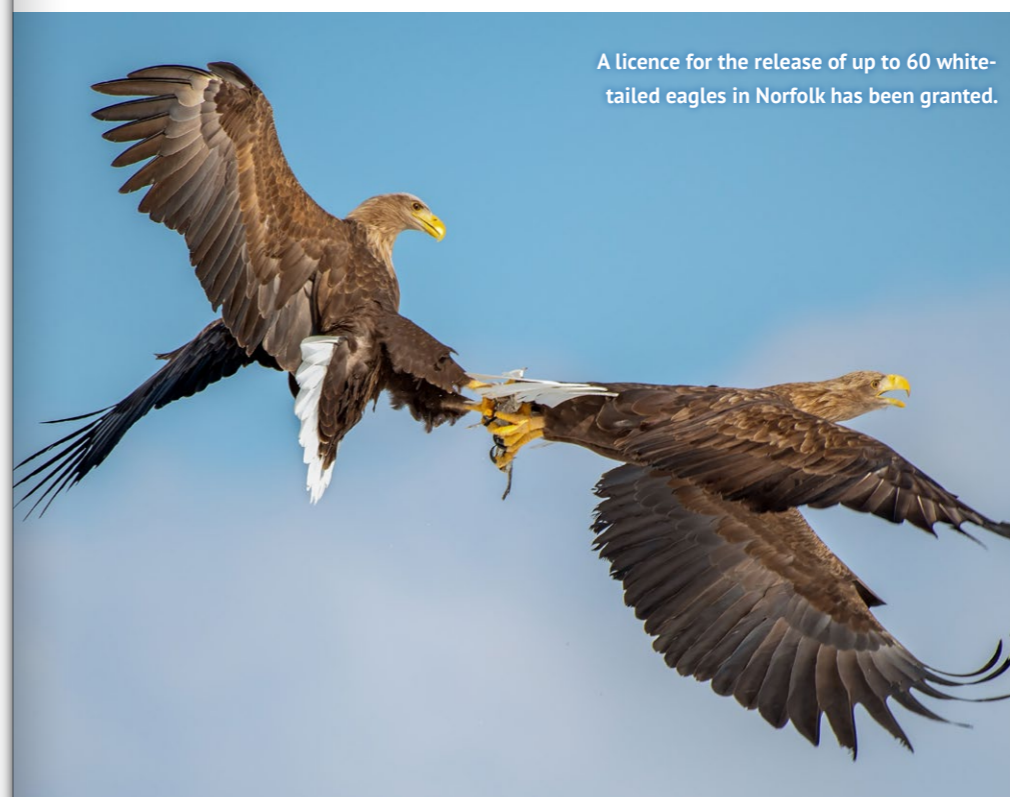
Engagement

NSA believes the Roy Dennis and Forestry Commission team are going out of their way to engage with the sheep farming industry and to monitor the behaviour of the birds, particularly acutely if they are in areas of sheep farming. There are active sheep farmers involved, including outside lambers. To date no problems have been reported, but the project is only planned to continue for five years and the birds will only just be reaching maturity, as well as only just possibly adding to numbers through breeding, at that point.

While NSA does not agree with the Norfolk licensing decision, it would have far preferred a longer focus on monitoring the Isle of Wight release. NSA will commit to working constructively with the Wild Ken Hill project team to help its success – part of which will be measured by no negative impact on sheep farmers legitimate business activities.

And NSA asks that should the concerns raised become reality, as seen in Scotland, an 'exit plan' is formulated to ensure all aspects of animal welfare are addressed in a timely manner.

There is a risk with apex predator releases that in years to come we may be forced to protect our livestock more – housing them, managing them less extensively and keeping them in more intensive conditions. If so, this will conflict with a host of other government and public objectives, health and welfare conditions, antibiotic use and resource efficiency.



A licence for the release of up to 60 white-tailed eagles in Norfolk has been granted.

Survey highlights increase in predator attacks on UK flocks

By Grace Reid, NSA

A recent NSA Scottish Region survey revealed a staggering 90% of respondents had experienced an increase of predator attacks in the three years prior to 2020.

This survey involved a cross section of the agricultural industry, including landowners, farm workers, contract shepherds, game keepers and tenant farmers.

Consensus was that the increase in the number of attacks was due to an increase in predators species, which were protected by law, combined with a decrease in the number of those on the ground who could control such predators.

Additional factors of competition and lack of other food sources, coupled with more shepherds lambing flocks outside, may also be contributing to the increase in predator attacks. Many of us are all too aware of the fatal consequences, particularly to vulnerable newborn lambs and their mothers. Yet the realities seem to be sorely lacking understanding outside the agricultural industry.

Predation

In Scotland ravens, crows and foxes are the worst culprits when it comes to predation on our flocks, with black-backed gulls and badgers not far behind. Regrettably, these occurrences are not just limited to Scotland.

RSPB estimates there are 7,400 breeding pairs of ravens in the UK, 260,000 breeding pairs

of hooded crow, a million territories of carrion crow and 600,000 territories of magpie. These birds are members of the same bird family and are currently categorised under the 'green list' (species occurring regularly in the UK and the least critical group outlined by RSPB conservation priorities). There are also an estimated 17,000 breeding pairs of great black-backed gull and 110,000 breeding pairs of lesser black-backed gull, currently categorised on RSPB's 'amber list', which is the second most critical group for conservation after red.

While it would seem the occurrence of bird predation is on the rise, many shepherds find themselves in a similar position with ground-borne predators. Defra estimates the UK population of badgers to be between 250,000 and 400,000 head. Again however, the badger is a protected species whereby licences can only be issued with significant supporting evidence to prevent serious damage by badgers to land, crops, poultry or other property. It is notable that culling licences issued in England and Wales are, predominantly, to control transmission of TB between badgers and cattle, alongside licensed vaccination.

An estimated 375,000 foxes populated the UK in 2018, according to Natural England and the Mammal Society. By comparison, 64% of Scottish survey respondents had their sheep farming enterprises preyed on by foxes and 44% experienced badger predation. While both badgers and foxes do not have any significant



Crows are among the worst predators threatening UK flocks.

predators, it is notable that only the badger is protected. This is undoubtedly a factor of discord towards the protection of our national flock.

Restrictions

While there are many restrictions around predator control in the UK, there is no doubt calls for licencing revision are long overdue in the event of non-lethal techniques being exhausted or obsolete. The current licence application processes are appropriately stringent, with farmers required to prove birds (ravens in particular) have caused, or are at high risk of causing, serious damage. NSA has supported this to ensure no action is taken without considered reason. By comparison, the consequences of illegal measures, such as acting to kill or harm ravens without a licence, could result in up to six months imprisonment and a £5,000 fine per offence, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The purpose of protecting a species is to ensure numbers do not fall below dangerous levels, and when positive progress is made and populations boom, options must be provided to prevent unintended consequences on other species of domestic and wild animals.

But we may find ourselves in a similar position in some of the more remote and rural landscapes found across the UK. It can be increasingly difficult to protect our flocks when the predator is under protected-species status, with the announcements of further rewilding likely to add to the pressure.

Our national shepherds and gamekeepers are instrumental to achieving this, not only for their flocks but also the surrounding wildlife that contributes significantly towards biodiversity and, no doubt, sustainability in the wider ecosystem.

Foxes have preyed on 64% of Scottish survey respondents' flocks.



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Winner of NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year soon to be announced

It has been a long wait for our Next Generation Shepherd of the Year finalists, with Covid-19 halting their journey to the national finals at the postponed 2020 event.



But now, with the help of online platforms and video technology, the skilled young shepherds will finally find out who will receive a share of the £2,000 prize-money pot, kindly donated by competition sponsors the Texel Sheep Society.

Having completed the final online assessments, which included demonstrating their ATV handling skills and anthelmintic administration technique, the finalists were set a surprise challenge to create a promotional plan to be used on social media highlighting Love Lamb week, which is held in the first week of September each year.

Judges from all UK levy boards are now waiting to rate the promotional ideas before the ultimate winners can be announced in mid-June.

Look out for the results announcements soon in NSA's Weekly Email Update and on NSA social media channels, as well as a feature on the winners in the next edition of Sheep Farmer magazine.

The usual in-person NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition has moved online in 2020/21.

What's coming up?

Some major NSA Next Generation initiatives are planned for the second half of 2021, including an international online event with young sheep farmers from Australia, New Zealand, USA and Canada. Plans are also afoot to allow young shepherds to access world-class genetics in a joint project with a leading UK breeder.

If you don't already receive the NSA Next Generation e-newsletter, email your name and date of birth to enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk; you do not have to be an NSA member.

NSA Next Generation Ambassadors activity updates

Before the current cohort of NSA Next Generation ambassadors are able to meet in person again, at a planned training and development session in July, three of the group give a quick update on their recent farming activity.

Jack Charleton Derbyshire



Lambing finished after what seemed to be another kind April. Our next jobs involve taking a draw of lambs out of the February lambing flock. We rotationally graze this flock on forage rape and grass, but April's frosts meant we ran short of grass, so moved this flock to lower ground that grows better grass.

The lambs are now motoring and we are hoping for a draw to keep up with supply to the farm shop here at Chatsworth Estate. After this, we will start to look at worm testing our early-April-born lambs, and begin drenching, vaccinating and fly spraying.

As lockdown restrictions ease I am looking forward to being able to do more with the NSA Ambassadors and meet up and visit other sheep farms. I've recently taken on the Vice Chairman role for NSA Central Region too, so I am keen to get stuck into more face-to-face meetings.

Clover Crosse Wiltshire



After a busy few months I recently spent a week away from the farm on a tree climbing and aerial rescue course. Like many others, I underestimate the benefits of time away, doing something completely different to my 'normal'. I have also been busy shearing several small local flocks. Again, this is a good thing to get me off the farm. And plans to start my own sheep flock continue to tick along nicely.

David Hodges County Antrim



The first cut of silage should be underway by the time Sheep Farmer arrives with members, which should take some pressure off our other grassland. Limited grass growth it has left pasture relatively well grazed, particularly for this time of year. Once silaging is done, shearing will start. I have been reluctant to do any clipping yet, as I felt it just was not warm enough and was worried about black bag in our ewes.

We have just completed some renovations to our indoor clamps, which should give us an extra bay of clamp space, before filling it with ewes in January again. The first batch of lambs will soon be getting weaned, which is hard to believe. It will be interesting to see how they have performed.



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Do environmental pressures leave room for all out production?

David Hodges, NSA Next Generation Ambassador from Ballymoney, County Antrim, acknowledges his family's intensive system may not fit the Government's future vision of UK farming, given that it's entirely focused on maximising production.

David says: "We run what many would consider an intensive system farming across two sites, totalling 100 acres, with around 200 Texel cross Mules and 100 beef cattle.

"Our flock is shipped out to winter grazing pre tupping until scanning in January. Ewes are then brought inside with just singles remaining outside until six weeks before lambing. Our flock, therefore, only grazes our grass for approximately six months of the year, as we simply do not have the area to keep enough grass in front of them.

"Our aim has always been to produce as much as we can from the land we have and, with land in short supply and high value here in North East Antrim, buying more land is, unfortunately, not an option."

David says ewes and lambs are trough-fed from around five weeks post-lambing, before creep feeders are put into the fields and topped up daily. The aim is to have 20% of lambs finished by weaning time, which is slightly early at 10 weeks. Post-weaning, lambs continue to be creep-fed and offered the best grass, with the intention of everything being finished and off the farm by September – a target that has been met for the past two years running. Pasture then has time to freshen up for flushing.

Low emissions

"The fact our system allows for early finishing of lambs could be argued as actually doing more for the environment, as total carbon emissions are reduced," says David.

"I believe there is a place for both intensive and extensive systems, but currently it would not be financially sustainable for us to run a system



Due to our smaller acreage we have to resort to more intensive production to make a liveable income.

David Hodges



with more environmental focus. Due to our smaller acreage we have to resort to more intensive production to make a liveable income, and to bring in additional income we also have poultry houses on farm. If there were more incentives to run extensively, we would look at those options. But we have to be allowed to run a system that suits our individual circumstances."

Creep feeders have also traditionally been a familiar sight on Bryan and Liz Griffiths' farm, based at Burrington, North Devon.

Bryan says: "Our intensive production method owes much to the support systems that were in place in our formative years. In the days before area payments or stewardship schemes, financial support came primarily in the form of a deficiency payment, paid on lambs marketed and finished to the satisfaction of the dreaded MLC grader.

"This led to the rise of the consistently prolific Mule ewe, indoor lambing and the costly, but reliable and effective, hopper feeder. Looking back several decades, almost without exception, the more lambs we reared and marketed in a year, the better the finances stacked up. Of course, there are considerable costs, but they are understood and calculable. Creep feed, for example, might cost £12 per lamb but gives a range of benefits, not least predictable weekly

sales of well-finished lambs irrespective of weather conditions or pasture quality."

Bryan and Liz accept the environmental credentials of such a system are increasingly under the spotlight, with the use of imported soya and tightly grazed pastures subject to criticism. They are now looking to make changes in line with ELMS, albeit with some reservations.

Demand

"I applaud Defra's development of ELMS, but worry it will lead to a loss of production at a time when, in spite of daily assertions that red meat is 'damaging', we are enjoying unprecedented demand and prices for our stock," says Bryan.

"A combination of time of life, no obvious farming successor and the good fortune to



Our intensive production method owes much to the support systems that were in place in our formative years.

Bryan Griffiths



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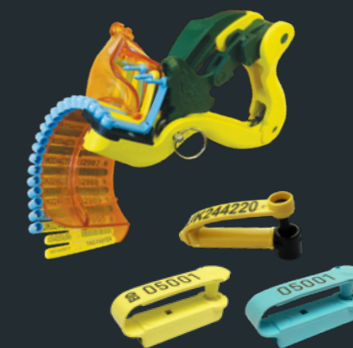
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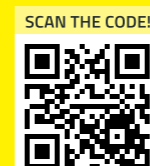
Weight gain and flock data recording using EID tags reveal a bigger health and performance picture, allowing treatment intervention quicker often before other symptoms and growth checks occur. Weighing can reveal if an individual requires treatment and ensures any flock worming or mineral supplementing is undertaken accurately and is more beneficial also reducing parasite resistance build up.

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Didling Farms, West Sussex, gave Matt invaluable experience in sheep production.

Data drives success for independent sheep adviser

By Katie James, NSA

A career path straight into arable farming would have seemed the obvious choice for NSA English Committee member Matt Blyth.

Growing up on a 4,000 acre (1,600ha) arable farm in Lincolnshire, surrounded by state-of-the-art tractors, crops and just a handful of sheep, the expectation was set for Matt to follow other family members to work on the farm. But a passion for livestock production has seen him become a shepherd, a farm manager and now an independent sheep and beef adviser, with his own business advising other livestock farmers across the UK.

With dyslexia making conventional education difficult Matt left school, he admits, without the best of qualifications. There was the promise of future employment where he had grown up if he first headed to agricultural college. But this plan resulted in Matt's eyes being opened to a career working with beef and sheep, rather than his expected path into crop production.

Studying

Matt travelled north from college in Lincolnshire to attend Kirkley Hall College in Northumberland, studying a specialist sheep and beef management course before taking the position of Assistant Shepherd at Chibolton Down Farm, Hampshire. His next move took him to



Matt Blyth.

Didling Farms in West Sussex, initially working as a shepherd for several years before becoming estate and farm manager for the 1,200-acre (485ha) enterprise.

During his 15 years at Didling, Matt first saw the benefits of using data to move the sheep farming business forward. Being one of the first advocates for using electronic identification (EID) technology in the UK, the farm began collecting data with the purchase of an EID reader and digital weigh head, which he fixed to the farm's existing weigh scales. With the benefits of collecting data quickly becoming obvious to Matt, new and modern automated equipment was quickly sought for the farm. "From then on, data drove our decisions. We had factual information to go on instead of going with our gut feelings," says Matt. With the performance of the farm's 1,000 breeding ewes carefully scrutinised by the figures EID was supplying, Matt had the farm owner's backing to further its use.

Decisions

"I'm wary of calling us revolutionary, but I worked for a businessman – not a farmer. His advisers understood data and expected to see reliable figures to help form decisions. They weren't interested in knowing information about the actual sheep. They just wanted to know how they could make a profit, and the information allowed us to validate this more easily."

Data collection saw Matt and the farm become involved in several important studies, including

research into anthelmintic resistance with the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group and levy board AHDB's Sheep KPI Validation project. The final results from this are yet to be released.

Having gained this and other valuable experience in many aspects of the business, Matt was encouraged to set up his own consultancy company by the farm owners while still managing the farm. Having spent time working with respected sheep adviser Lesley Stubbings, and with his own experience of using EID, Matt was well placed to take the natural progression into advisory work himself.

When the farm was ultimately sold, Matt decided to focus on his own business entirely. Now, three years later, data is set to take an even more significant role in managing livestock farms. With new programmes such as the Livestock Information Programme (LIP) soon to be launched, Matt says he is enjoying using his own experience to help other farmers and software manufacturers improve their systems and prepare for changing times.

Performance

"Data drives businesses and, unfortunately, as an industry, we are not very good at looking at it. But it is invaluable. Not only does data give insight to current farm performance, but in time, it also allows you to predict what might be coming. This is key to business success," he says.

Matt is a great believer in thoroughly examining all potential options when looking at a farm system, encouraging his clients to sometimes resist the easier options in favour of thinking outside of the box. With the upcoming changes to farm support payments, he says it has never been more important to do this and, once again, in conjunction with increased data capture on the farm. "The industry is at a point of change, with the end of BPS, a continued drive to reduce antibiotic use and increasing consumer demand for about how and where their food is produced. To meet these requirements, I believe precision farming will be vital," he says.

Working as an independent adviser, Matt is aware this may take time to be adopted by the sector, with upcoming changes in policy such as ELMS and LIP still being little understood by many. "Many farmers are still taking the 'wait and see' approach rather than doing their research now into what to expect, and planning ahead accordingly. The upcoming changes could mean some need to make significant changes to modernise their businesses. When many have not changed anything for generations, this could be difficult."

Matt considers a change in some approaches is essential for future commercial livestock enterprises and believes it is down to colleges, as

Matt believes frequent data collection is key to a successful business.

"I am better informed to help the farmers I meet on a day-to-day basis."

Matt Blyth

well as older farming generations, to encourage the next generation into a new style of sheep farming. "Attitudes need to change," he stresses. "The appetite for electronic-data capture, and all it can offer, must be adopted more widely and enthusiastically."

Matt is about to begin a Nuffield Scholarship, evaluating the potential cost benefits of electronic-data recording for UK beef and sheep farms. "I'll be looking at data from farms in combination with data from governments across the globe, and using that information to consider how a more profitable business can be built."

Projects

An interest in feeding into future projects in the UK was one reason Matt was pleased to be nominated to join NSA's English Committee, representing NSA South East Region, earlier this year. "I've been a member for more than 25 years, so NSA has always been part of my career. But now I have more time to dedicate to committees, and I am better informed to help the farmers I meet on a day-to-day basis."

Matt is also hoping to get involved with the recently launched Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA), a professional register where members will be able to claim CPD points to prove their capabilities as a professional consultant. "Until now, anyone has been able to call themselves a sheep expert with no formal body recognising this. RoSA can change this to the benefit of the country's sheep farmers while, at the same time, creating a network of incredibly knowledgeable and experienced people."

The timing of Matt's full-time venture into self-employment, just ahead of the Covid-19 outbreak,

could have been testing for a relatively new business. But at a time when many farmers have taken advantage of the Government's Countryside Productivity Grants to purchase new electronic handling and weighing equipment, Matt found he was in the right place at the right time. "Many farmers need some kind of support package to go alongside their new equipment. I have been busy creating data-capture plans and will continue this support for many farmers moving forward. I'm optimistic this new way of precision farming will see the sheep sector flourish in the years to come."

More on RoSA on page 26.

Matt Blyth

- Independent sheep consultant.
- Many years of sheep farming, EID and data-capture experience.
- Offers support to other sheep producers, nationwide.
- NSA English Committee member, representing NSA South East Region.
- About to start a Nuffield Scholarship.



An electronic unit attached to a weigh crate at Didling Farms was the start of Matt's experience with EID.

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Qualified and well-informed advisers will be better able to engage with sheep farmers.

Register launched to advance advice for sheep farmers

NSA has been working with BASIS to develop the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA), launched on 1st June this year.

This approach is new for the sheep sector, but is common within the arable sector where BASIS-qualified advisers are an expectation. NSA's hope is, in 10 years' time, the same would be said for RoSA advisers for the sheep sector.

The register's vision is qualified and well-informed advisers who support engaged sheep farmers to become more profitable and sustainable. RoSA's mission is to support a professional continuous development programme (CPD) for sheep advisers to ensure sheep farmers can access the best and most appropriate advice to ensure their businesses will be ready for the upcoming opportunities and challenges.

Professional

The aim is for RoSA to have a range of members covering many subject areas, including vets, consultants who specialise in financial planning, advisers who specialise in using EID software and hardware, nutritionists, feed reps and environmental-scheme advisers. They will benefit from a way of demonstrating their professional status, building a network of

like-minded individuals and by having access to a wide range of training and technical activity. The hope is RoSA membership will be recognised by future farming initiatives to encourage sheep farmers to access advice.

NSA is encouraging sheep farmers, processors and others in the supply chain to work with RoSA members. To be accepted on to the register, the adviser must demonstrate suitable qualifications, experience and engagement with the sheep industry. Once they have passed these hurdles, they need to collect points through the year on a range of categories to demonstrate they are keeping their knowledge up to date. The points required equate to up to 40 hours of CPD each year.

Companies and organisations running events, workshops and conferences, or providing technical content or memberships relevant to sheep advisers, can register with BASIS as a CPD provider. They can register each activity for RoSA points, and all registered events will be circulated to RoSA members through the app, the website and quarterly newsletter.

Sheep farmers can search for advisers to support their business on the RoSA website. Names will be added as applications are processed from 1st June.



Support for RoSA

Alison Bond, Rumenco Technical Manager

"I often run training courses on ruminant nutrition so it is important my team and I have access to the most up-to-date information and CPD opportunities. RoSA will also provide a way to belong to a network of like-minded sheep advisers.

"As sheep farmers adapt to new legislation and reduction of support payments, it will become more essential for them to access sound, suitable and relevant advice to benefit their business. The register provides the sheep sector with a unique opportunity that benefits the end users and the advisers."

Matt Blyth, independent adviser

"I have worked my way up from assistant shepherd to flock manager, and now an adviser specialising in precision farming. I will value the opportunity to build up a network and access people with other skills and knowledge, particularly as I am just starting out as an adviser."

Liz Genever, independent consultant

"I have been involved in the development of RoSA and am really encouraged by the support by advisers and companies who want to be involved. The sheep industry is leading the way, particularly as a focus on skills is increasing. It is likely farmers of the future will need different skills, for example grass and feed budgeting or monitoring biodiversity, and this programme will help to ensure advisers are ready to help."

Find out more, become a RoSA member or register as a CPD provider at www.sheepadvisers.co.uk. RoSA members can gain points by having an NSA subscription, due to the technical messages NSA shares with members. Membership details are on the NSA website.

Top tips for working with an adviser

- Have a clear question or problem you want help with.
- What outcome do you want? A visit, a report, a five-year plan or a coaching session?
- Speak to several advisers to make sure you find the right one.
- Think about involving everyone who makes decisions on the farm in the meeting.
- Consider whether it may be a long-term relationship, or just to solve a specific query.
- Have performance data ready for them, for example scanning and rearing percentages or growth rates, plus farm maps.
- Consider if a virtual/phone support session may be more cost-effective than a visit.



Project highlights value of high-genetic-merit rams



Using high index terminal sire rams on commercial flocks RamCompare follows the performance of crossbred lambs from birth to slaughter to determine overall carcass value and profitability.

Fifth-year results from RamCompare project highlight value of high-genetic-merit rams

The fifth-year results from the RamCompare project reveal how rams with key breeding traits can drive productivity and optimise flock profitability. RamCompare is the UK's commercial progeny test for terminal sires, demonstrating how commercial sheep farmers can use specific estimated breeding values (EBVs) to identify rams with high genetic potential and prove their worth when assessing financial impact.

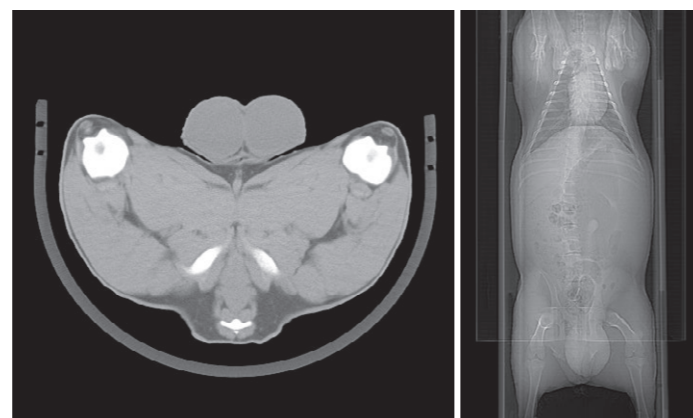
Each year a team of rams are nominated by the industry for use on one or more of RamCompare's commercial trial farms, and the performance of their progeny is assessed from birth to slaughter.

Weight records and ultrasound measurements of muscle and fat are collected on each farm, with this data being used within the National Terminal Sire Evaluations produced by Signet. Abattoir records are used to predict EBVs for Days to Slaughter, Carcass Weight, Conformation and Fat Class, as well as breeding values for primal weights and shear force, which is an indicator of meat-eating quality.

RamCompare farm sees great results through increased carcass weight and conformation

RamCompare data collected in 2020 shows the value of commercial lambs at Adrian and Lyn Coombe's Dupath Farm, based in Cornwall, was greatly influenced by the genetic merit of their sires. The use of rams with high Carcass Weight EBVs routinely increased lamb values by £4 per lamb.

With the genetic potential to lift carcass weights by more than 0.5kg per lamb, the top-performing sires on this farm – a Meatline from Clive and Jenny Richardson and a Charollais ram, Dalby Ranieri, from Charles Sercombe – both share an attribute in common – they are the product of selective breeding using the CT scanner.



CT images of Dalby Ranieri.

Levy funding helped introduce the CT scanning service to the UK sheep industry back in the 1990s, and levy support continues to this day, enabling many of the country's top ram lambs to be sent for CT scanning. As well as measuring muscle and fat yield within the carcass, CT is also used to measure spine length, vertebrae number and intramuscular fat percentage – traits that all now have breeding values available through Signet.

Ultimately, CT scanning allows ram breeders to select breeding lines with superior yields of meat at a given liveweight and, in the case of both of these rams, they sit comfortably within the top 5% of their breed for the CT Lean Weight EBV. The high performance of their offspring could have been predicted before they set foot on the farm, and it is perhaps no surprise to see they also had the highest proportion of E and U grade carcasses.

Signet Breeding Services' Samuel Boon says: "Two years ago, Signet changed the way it assesses carcass traits to identify those with a greater yield of meat at a fixed weight. This greatly enhanced the benefit of using EBVs to improve carcass weight and conformation for commercial farmers, who typically want to know about muscling at a specific liveweight."

"The new approach makes better use of the ultrasound and CT scan data recorded in ram breeding flocks and means commercial farmers selling lambs should make greater use of these breeding values, if they wish to

enhance carcass weights. It also helps farmers to select rams with a high Scan Weight EBV, if they wish to reduce days to slaughter."

These genetic benefits add up, resulting in the average financial gain on this farm to be in excess of £1,000 per ram during their working lifetime. This is done simply by selecting the ram with the right combination of EBVs.

Results demonstrate an increase in lamb carcass value is achieved with careful sire selection

After collecting data across five breeding seasons, the performance of 26,000 commercial lambs sired by more than 280 rams has been recorded. The RamCompare project has used this information to greatly enhance the genetic evaluations Signet, supported by AHDB, provides to the industry. This is shown through the following outputs:

- The EBVs produced by Signet are good indicators of progeny performance on commercial farms
- Abattoir derived data has been used to produce new EBVs – traits that are extremely valuable to commercial ram producers
- Ram buyers can use existing breeding values with confidence to select more profitable rams

The commercial value of breeding traits will vary from farm to farm. But, by selecting individuals with the right combination of EBVs, farmers can identify the most profitable rams for their business. Selecting rams by using breeding traits to guide decisions will achieve increased outputs in the commercial lamb enterprise, these include:

- Sire has high Scan Weight EBV: increased progeny growth rates and reduced days to slaughter
- Sire has high Scan Weight/Muscle Depth EBVs: progeny have increased carcass weights
- Sire has superior Muscle Depth/Gigot Muscularity EBVs: enhanced carcass conformation in the progeny
- Fat Depth EBV of the sire: a reliable indicator of the fat classification achieved by progeny



Charollais AI sire Dalby Ranieri, provided by Charles Sercombe.

The data from the past five years has highlighted, whatever the farm, there is a clear link between the genetic merit of the rams being used and the value of their offspring. As seen in the chart below, there is a benefit of between £4 and £5 per lamb arising from the highest genetic merit sires on each of the four farms.

How the RamCompare project benefits the wider industry

The UK sheep industry shows an extensive range of genetic variation with a wealth of opportunities, with six different breeds topping at least one of the RamCompare leader tables this year. Ultimately, decisions on commercial farms should reflect the profitability of each trait to the enterprise – and this varies with production systems and end market.

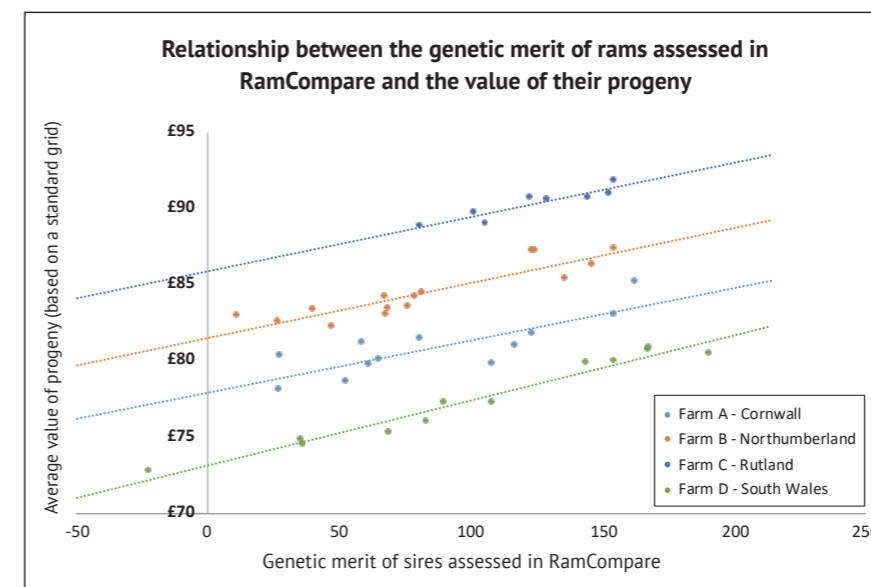
RamCompare – jointly funded by the three levy boards (AHDB, QMS and HCC), as well as Sainsbury's and Agrisearch – is dedicated to showcasing

the benefits of EBV-based ram selection to enhance those traits on which farmers are paid.

What is next for RamCompare?

With funding now confirmed by AHDB, QMS and HCC, the RamCompare breeding project is launching phase III this year. The project will build on the work completed during the past five years, testing a wider number of rams from a range of terminal sire breeds. Research is planned to incorporate carcass traits into routine evaluations, and new bolt-on projects are being developed to enable breeders to get more directly involved in the supply of progeny data for abattoir traits.

All the latest results and news from RamCompare can be found at www.ramcompare.com



FUNDERS

AHDB, QMS, AgriSearch, Sainsbury's

COLLABORATORS

dunbia, RPE, ebvc, SRUC, NEGEN

SUPPORTERS

Allflex, Shearwell Data, Elanco, FARMPAN, Farnit3000

Blackies underpin stratified sheep enterprise

A carefully managed Blackface flock underpins a 5,500-head stratified sheep business in the Scottish borders.

The Freeland-Cook family have had the 1,100-acre tenancy at Cliftoncote, from Roxburgh Estates, for 35 years. But recently Paul and Angela, and their two sons Allistair and Daniel, have expanded through contract farming and grazing agreements to farm 4,250 acres in the beautiful Bowmont Valley, south of Kelso.

Their six units range from 2,200 feet above sea level, at Calroust, down to around 500 feet, at Old Graden and Cherrytrees, with many different soil types. So sheep breeds have been carefully selected for each farm.

Allistair, who runs the enterprise along with his wife Claire and stockman Stuart Darling, says: "It would be impossible to find one breed to suit all the farms, but everything starts with the Blackface at the top of the valley."

Because the Blackface ewe is the foundation for all the flocks, Allistair keeps a strict handle on the management and breeding programme of the 750 bred pure. Since they took on the 2,000 acres at Calroust he has been able to breed his own replacements.

"By culling hard, I have seen a big improvement in fertility and mothering," he says. "Tups only go out for 22 days and they don't get a second chance. Anything yield goes, and any stock with bad feet, teeth, udders and so on will be culled, and progeny will be marked and not kept for breeding."

"The Blackface ewe is about utilising the hill and working hard, and by the time we are finished with her she owes us nothing."

Commercial

The best ewe lambs are retained and about 60 tup hogs are kept each year, but by clipping time numbers are down to 20. "For us, it is all about breeding hard-working, big, commercial ewes," says Allistair. "Since becoming a closed flock, I like the type we are developing and my aim is to eventually sell some commercial shearlings."

A flock of 40 pedigree Bluefaced Leicesters are kept for breeding tups to put to 700 Blackface ewes to breed replacements for the 1,500 Scotch Mules at Cliftoncote and Old Graden. These are, in turn, crossed with the Meatlinc. Around 400 of these first-cross hogs are also put to the tup and the gimmers feed into the 1,200 Meatlinc cross Mule flock at Cherrytrees, which are again crossed with the Meatlinc.

The strict breeding policy runs right through the flocks. Allistair believes keep lambing periods as short as possible is key to an easier life.

None of the Blackface or Mule ewes are flushed, although any lean Blackies will come in-bye. Teaser tups are used and then the tups go out with the Mules and Meatlinc crosses for just 18 days.

Scanning percentages are good, with Mules and Meatlinc crosses at between 180% and 190%, the high hill Blackies, at Calroust, at between 145% and 150%, and the home-farm Blackies at 160%.

The family has plenty of experience with various sheep breeds thanks

to a contract shepherding agreement they recently took on, where they look after 1,000 Cheviots which they cross with Romney tups. The Pirindale is a good result and, using New Zealand genetics, the sheep are hardy and prolific. But, in Allistair's opinion, nothing can beat a Scotch Mule.

"She ticks all the boxes, milks well and is a prolific, hard-working, good mum," he says. "Mules, as a breed, are the best maternal sheep I have worked with and they get that from their mothers. The Blackie has to be right for the Mule to be right. They don't need a lot of feeding or flushing to scan 190% and they take some beating for finishing lambs."

Traditional

"I feel people are overlooking traditional breeds in favour of some of the new composites, but we have traditional sheep on a modern system and it works. We look after 5,000 sheep and the Blackies and Mules need little intervention and are the original easy-care sheep."

Everything is finished on farm. The three-quarter Meatlinc lambs lamb late February/early March and the lambs are creep fed from three weeks to take advantage of the early lamb trade in May. The Meatlincs and Mules are finished off grass, as are about a third of the Blackies, with the remainder finished on kale and stubble turnips. Fodder beet is also grown for wintering ewes.

All the lambs go deadweight to Woodhead Brothers, with the Blackies easily attaining between 19.5kg and 20kg deadweight.

Mules lamb from the first week in April with triplets and singles inside for ease of twinning on and twins outside. Blackies are all lambed outside from the final week in April, with the hill ewes just receiving energy buckets.

Allistair works closely with his local vets to deliver a health plan suited to the farms. Ewes are wormed just once a year and pre-tupping receive a flukicide dose and bolus. Following their first dose for nematodes, lambs are not routinely wormed unless faecal egg counts show a problem.

"If feet have to be treated twice then the sheep is culled," says Allistair. "We don't footbath or vaccinate, we also don't vaccinate for abortion."

As well as keeping sheep health right, management tools, such as rotational grazing, are used on the lower farms. Batches of between 200 and 300 ewes are moved from field to field, as required, and if a field is missed out it can be cut for silage to feed ewes or, more probably, the 120 Saler and Hereford cattle that Allistair's brother Daniel looks after.

"For us rotational grazing hasn't been so much about increasing stocking rates, but more about utilising the grass efficiently and providing lambs with better quality grass so they finish quicker," adds Allistair.

Blackface Sheep Breeder' Association

For more information contact Aileen McFadzean on 07768 820405. Sale dates, sale reports and news updates are available to view online at www.scottish-blackface.co.uk.



Suffolks going strong – after 135 years



This year we are celebrating the 135th anniversary of the formation of the Suffolk Sheep Society.

The Suffolk breed has been at the forefront of the British and Irish sheep meat industry since the 1800s and the Suffolk ram still holds the place as the leading terminal sire throughout UK and Ireland.

The past 12 months have, undoubtedly, been some of the most challenging for the society with Covid-19 and Brexit dominating discussions. That said, 2020 turned out to be an excellent sales season. More sheep were sold in 2020 than in 2019, with a higher value and an increase in averages across the Society.

Outperform

Not only do Suffolks finish faster and outperform other breeds for muscle depth, Suffolk-sired lambs continue to produce an excellent early lamb with great muscling and marbling.

Recent studies by AHDB/Signet's Ramcompare project and the Ulster University's Food and Consumer Testing Suite have highlighted the benefits of the Suffolk breed for producers and Suffolk-sired meat has

been shown to be first choice for 70% of consumers, with key attributes being taste, flavour and texture.

Because the Suffolk can deliver in a variety of environments and is not troubled with respiratory problems, commercial farmers are becoming more reliant on Suffolk ram as many other breeds struggle to perform in the current hot summers.

Qualities

Traditionally a terminal sire, more farmers are also using Suffolks for their maternal qualities and are discovering that difficulties, such as mastitis, are not an issue for Suffolk ewes. Ninety-four percent of the national Suffolk pedigree flock is highly resistant to Scrapie.

Looking forward to the 2021 sales, there will still be challenges. But there is light at the end of the tunnel regarding Covid-19 restrictions. Introducing Suffolk genetics into a flock offers financial benefits. A faster finished healthy lamb, with excellent muscling and marbling, makes perfect financial sense. So whether your business is prime, store or breeding lambs, Suffolks continue to deliver for the farmer, the processor and the consumer.



Society Sale Dates 2021

17th July - Northern Ireland Branch Premier Export Sale (Ballymena)

22nd July - Scottish Area Sale (Lanark)

30th July - National Sale (Shrewsbury)

6th August - Northern Counties Branch Sale (Carlisle)

www.suffolksheep.org Tel: 028 2563 2342



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BELTEX



Sheep Society Virtual Show Season 2021

Following on from the success of the 2020 virtual show season and coupled with the ongoing show season uncertainty, the Beltex Sheep Society has decided to run its virtual show season again for 2021.

The shows will provide light-hearted fun, and there will again be prize cards and money on offer. There will be no entry fee but exhibitors may send a donation to the Society or forgo their prize money, which will then be passed on to the Society's chosen charity.

These shows will be held on their traditional date with exceptions being the RHS virtual show will be held on the Friday as is the typical Beltex judging day, and the GYS virtual judging will take place on the Thursday so as not to clash with the physical Great Yorkshire judging.

There will also be a virtual progeny show near the end of the season which will include classes for groups of lambs by the same sire, groups of breeding ewes and shearlings, as well as commercial classes for prime lambs and stock ewes, and some much requested young handlers classes. Keep an eye on the Society's Facebook page and website for further details.

Major shows included are:

Wed 12 May	Balmoral
Thu 10 June	Royal Cornwall
Fri 11 June	Royal Three Counties
Fri 18 June	Royal Highland
Wed 30 June	Royal Norfolk
Thurs 15 July	Great Yorkshire
Sat 17 July	Penrith
Mon 19 July	Royal Welsh

As well as National Shows

(exhibitors MUST be a member of the relevant club to take part):

Sat 12 Jun	Welsh National
Sat 3 Jul	Irish National
Sat 6 Aug	Scottish National

Please see the website for a full run down of the guidelines on how to enter.

SALES

Thame Sheep Fair (Club)	Thurs 5 & Fri 6 August	Melton Mowbray (Society)	Sat 4 Sept
Carlisle Premier (Society)	Thurs 12 - Sat 14 August	Skipton (Club)	Sat 4 September
NSA Exeter (Club)	Wed 18 August	Kendal (Club)	Mon 13 September
Omagh (Club)	Sat 21 August	Ballymena (Club)	Mon 13 September
Melton Mowbray (Club)	Sat 21 August	Ruthin (Club)	Tues 14 September
Leek (Society)	Wed 25 August	Lanark (Club)	Thurs 16 September
Dungannon (Club)	Mon 30 August	Stirling (Club)	Sat 18 September
Welshpool (Club)	Wed 1 September	Hexham (Club)	Wed 22 September
Worcester (Society)	Fri 3 September	Frome (Society)	Fri 24 September
		Omagh (Club)	Fri 24 September
		Carlisle (Society)	Sat 25 September



Lucky ticket opened up Roussin opportunity for Cumbrian farmer



Ease of lambing, lamb vigour and easy finishing are traits highly valued by Phillip Elliott, who has honed his skills at breeding from hogs profitably.

When he bought a charity raffle ticket at the Roussin Sheep Society stand, at NSA North in 2019, he never expected to win the pedigree ram 'McCormick Jackpot' – or for the breed to possess all the traits he values. But since winning 'Jackpot', Phillip has been thrilled by the performance of the ram's lambs. What's more, 'Jackpot' raised £500 for Marie Curie and Cancer Research.

Phillip and Denise Elliott run a 350-acre upland beef-and-sheep farm in Mungrisdale, Cumbria. They have around 1,000 Texel cross sheep and 100 cattle. They buy in 150 NE Mule ewe lambs each year, which are served with Texel. Female progeny are retained and the mule shearlings are sold. The Texel cross ewe lambs

are served with Roussin tups and are fed a forage-only diet to optimise lamb birth weights.

"We need a lamb that's the right shape for lambing, so it is born easily and willing to get up and seek milk," explains Phillip. "The Texel cross hogs are not always the quickest at mothering, but the Roussin-sired lambs literally chase them around the pen until they latch on to a teat – it really helps to develop that bond and saves the need to intervene."

The oldest ewes are lambed in January, with lambs and ewes being sold separately at weaning to maximise their value. The bulk of the flock is lambed in March/April and lambs are sold later in the year to the export trade, aiming for E and U grades. Ewe lambs from the milkiest mothers are ear notched and retained.

"We have retained some Roussin crosses to see how they perform, as we would like to ensure we retain milk and maternal characteristics," Phillip explains. "We tupped them as ewe lambs and we are impressed

with the results. They have lots of milk and are excellent mothers. The bonus is that I haven't had to compromise on conformation with the Roussin wethers."

The Roussin Society invite you to follow Phillip's story at www.roussinsheepsociety.org.uk.



The Elliott family and 'McCormick Jackpot', kindly donated by Martin McCormick (left), at the Roussin Premier Sale at Carlisle in 2019.

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Logie Durno Sheep quality bred in



Breeding with Logie Durno – a success story every time

Mark, Elaine, Tom and Issy Hartley run a successful sheep unit at the foot of Pendle Hill, in Lancashire. Integral to their success are Logie Durno tups.

Our farm is about 400 acres ranging from 500ft to 1,200ft above sea level. We run a modern sheep and beef unit, comprising 800 commercial ewes with 200 yell hogs following pedigree Blue Texels and a herd of pedigree British Blue cattle. We had a great sale at Carlisle the other day with five bulls averaging 7,140gns and a top of 16,000gns.

We have been running a stratified sheep system for a number of years. Lonks graze on the poorest ground, lambing to a Blue Face Leicester, then the homebred mules are tugged with a Texel to create our lowland flock. However, during the past couple of years, we have changed things around to improve the flocks. We are now tugging Lonks with Logie Durno Sheep's Fronteira rams. These white-faced ewes are then going to Logie tups.



Tom Hartley.

Impressed

We have been so impressed with the Logies we have decided to do away with the stratified system and just breed everything up to being Logies and just lamb one flock. We really would like to get things more uniform. Instead of selling everything from horned lambs to E-grade Texel types, all lambs will be Logies that grade and weigh the same.

We are aiming for R or U grade lambs at the maximum payable weight.

These changes will make life so much easier, with the flock being pretty much pure Logie and the only new sheep bought in each year being a couple of rams. We have 400 acres and would like to run as many sheep on it as possible, all white-faced medium-type ewes (65-70kg) scanning between 175% and 180%.

The biggest thing by far for us is buying rams from someone who is selecting hard for maternal traits. We have gone from lambing mules inside to lambing Logie crosses outside. So ewes must want their lambs and produce milk from grass.

Tremendous

Culling has also been harder during the past two years and the hogs, which have been retained, were wintered on really bare grass right up to lambing this year. However, the lambs are born alive and the hogs have milk for days out of the Logie. Since we started to cut back the Lonks and Mules we have seen some tremendous changes. This year the feed bill has been halved, and that is despite keeping more sheep and a really tough spring. Logies are now outperforming the previous flock.

Our main aims, going forward, are to reach a goal of 5% or less lamb mortality from scanning to weaning. In 2020 we achieved 7%. We want to have a whole flock of Logies, producing two lambs from grass, which we think is achievable as we have a reseeding programme in place which will reduce the amount of concentrates used.



The Hartleys now lamb just one flock.

John Jennings farms in Pembrokeshire, Wales, and gets a kick from seeing his lambs – bred from his Logie Durno rams – achieving success at market.

I run a flock of around 1,500 ewes, most of which are bought-in mules and, more recently, Texel mules. I have found the cross mules to be a bit hardier and better sheep this past couple of years.

I am a big believer in the live market, selling all my fat lambs live as well as my culls, and buying in my replacements. I just like watching my sheep sell and I really get a kick out of seeing my lambs doing well compared to others.

Four or five years ago I gave Logie Durno Sheep a call to see what they had to offer. I was getting a bit fed up with buying rams at sales from small flocks and them not lasting! I bought some of their Durnos that first year and haven't looked back. I now buy a selection of Durnos and Durno Beltex rams every year.

Top tier

The biggest thing for me is the quality of my lambs. I think the live market is split into three tiers, and my lambs were in the middle one before I began using Durno rams. I would now say that I am in the top tier – and, boy, does that up the price per kg. The lambs also grow quickly. I think I am weeks ahead, and one week managed to get more than 500 lambs in at the same size and weight.

All in all, buying rams direct from Logie Durno is working well for me. I am paying the same per ram as I used to, but my lambs are better, away quicker and the rams last longer in my flock. And I'm getting quite used to being proud of my lambs at market!



John is getting used to being proud of his lambs at market.

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The **Red Meat Development Programme** aims to equip the red meat sector for the future; promoting efficiency, profitability and sustainability throughout the supply chain, and ensuring a high-quality nutritious product that future consumers will demand.

STOC+
IECHYD
PRAIDD A BUCHES
FLOCK AND HERD
HEALTH



Stoc+ is a flock and herd health project which works with farmers and vets to promote active flock and herd health management. Around 300 farms are already reaping the benefits of this project. Stoc+ is also supporting almost 40 vet practices across Wales and currently has 6 vet ambassadors who are involved with the wider project dissemination.

42% of Stoc+ farms who manage sheep included worm control as one of their priority areas of focus. In response to this, HCC has worked with the other UK red meat levy bodies to update the information in the 'Worm Control in Sheep' publication which was launched in a recent webinar, hosted by HCC. The publication and a recording of the webinar can be found on the HCC website.



The **Hill Ram Scheme** is investing in Welsh hill and upland farming by applying the latest breeding technology with traditional flock husbandry in the hill sheep sector. To date, over 50 flocks from across Wales are utilising DNA parentage technology to support the understanding of their flocks' genetic potential and performance. This will allow participating farmers to make informed decisions on their breeding flock and also increase the number of performance recorded hill rams that are available to be used within commercial and pedigree flocks.



The majority of flocks on the project gather DNA information by using Tissue Sampling Unit (TSU) technology. Last year, samples from a total of 15,650 ewes and yearlings were gathered as part of the project. The project also has a number of manual recording flocks who are gathering performance data from their flock at various points during the year.

CYNLLUN
HYRDDOD
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HILL RAM
SCHEME

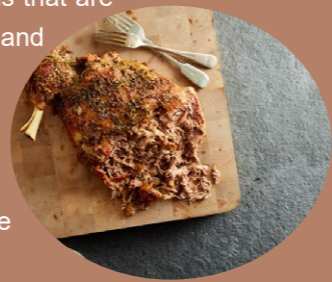


ANSAWDD
CIG OEN CYMRU
WELSH LAMB
MEAT QUALITY



The **Welsh Lamb Meat Quality** project is working towards developing a blueprint for the whole supply chain to ensure that we continue to deliver top taste consistency to consumers of PGI Welsh Lamb. The project will research on-farm and processing factors that influence eating quality. This will involve assessing the influence of farm and processing management process together with consumer cooking techniques. Examples of variations that are being assessed as part of the project are seasonality, slaughter age and specific lamb cuts.

The findings so far include evidence that meat from lambs reared on grass contain higher levels of protein-based amino acids compared to lambs reared on a concentrate diet. The samples taken from grass-fed lambs had significantly higher amounts of five healthy amino acids; Leucine, Lysine, Threonine, Tyrosine and Valine.



The Red Meat Development Programme is a 5-year programme which is funded by the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.



Farming – 'The Welsh Way'



Recent years have seen increased scrutiny on livestock farming and its contribution to climate change. Much of this discussion – particularly in the media – has lacked context on how different farming systems in various parts of the world have widely different footprints in terms of their emissions.

Too often, a 'global average' figure is used which bears no relation to how lamb is produced in these islands, and meat is unfairly demonised in discussions on climate change policy.



Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) has recently sought to redress the balance through publishing the 'Welsh Way' – a document which looks at the international context of climate change and sustainability, where Welsh sheep and beef farming currently stand, and where we can make further improvements.

Our new document draws on new research by independent scientists on emissions and carbon sequestration on a cross-section of Welsh family farms, as well as a range of other experts who have looked at our changing understanding of methane, and the potential positive impact of further improvements on farms and the supply chain, and on how agriculture underpins economic and cultural sustainability.

The research is very clear – there is much that Wales is already doing well, and our emissions are among the lowest in the world. We have farming systems that can utilise our natural resources of abundant grassland and rain water efficiently and sustainably meaning that we produce quality food with comparatively few additional inputs such as imported feeds. This means the consumer can be confident in choosing our lamb and beef.

Importantly it also means that cutting livestock numbers here risks merely 'off-shoring' our emissions by importing food from countries where standards aren't so high. Producing lamb in Wales, and even exporting it to countries which are less fortunate in terms of natural resources to support extensive livestock farming, is an excellent example of the right farming in the right place.

Armed with this robust evidence, and with more such evidence on the way through new research projects with Bangor University and others, HCC can ensure that sustainability is key to the Welsh Lamb brand. The food industry at home and abroad will be looking keenly for such credentials in years ahead; foods which can demonstrate sustainability will have the edge in the global marketplace.

As well as emphasising Wales's current strengths, however, the 'Welsh Way' vision also sets out a journey by which we can continue to improve, and become global exemplars of environmentally responsible farming.

There's more we can do, by taking measures which both help reduce emissions and strengthen farm businesses. Often, there are a number of incremental improvements rather than one 'silver bullet'. These include maximising the health and fertility of flocks and herds, further developments in genetics and adopting best practices in managing grasslands. We can also seek ways of combing new woodland and renewable energy generation sensitively in ways which dovetail with efficient productive farms.

Ongoing work with farmers and processors is already delivering improvements in shelf-life and reductions in waste. HCC's strategic EU and Welsh Government-funded Red Meat Development Programme focuses on several areas which have an impact on efficiency and sustainability; from animal health planning to genetic improvement of the national sheep flock.

Climate change is a huge challenge that all industries must contribute to mitigating. We argue that sheep farming in Wales already has a good story to tell, of efficient but non-intensive production, farming hand-in-hand with the natural resources we have in abundance, and with far fewer emissions than many other systems worldwide.

Continuing to make strides towards making our production world-leading in terms of sustainability will enable us to say with confidence to climate-conscious consumers that eating less meat isn't the answer, but being more aware of how and where their meat is produced.

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WORCESTER PREMIER	WORCESTER MARKET	EWES
DUNGANNON PREMIER	SATURDAY 26 TH JUNE	RAMS & EWES
SHREWSBURY	MONDAY 26 TH JULY	RAMS & EWES
NSA BUILTH (EARLY)	TUESDAY 27 TH JULY	RAMS
EXETER NSA	MONDAY 2 ND AUGUST	RAMS
CARLISLE	WEDNESDAY 18 TH AUGUST	RAMS & EWES
BALLYMENA	FRIDAY 27 TH AUGUST	RAMS & EWES
NSA BUILTH (MAIN)	MONDAY 20 TH SEPTEMBER	RAMS
WELSHPOOL	MONDAY 20 TH SEPTEMBER	RAMS & EWES
	THURSDAY 30 TH SEPTEMBER	RAMS

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Welsh Mules – a year as field officer



Will Jones became Field Officer for the Welsh Mules Breeder Association (WMBA) in April 2020 – just after the outbreak of Covid-19.



Will felt that being the Field Officer for the association was an honour, but accepted that he faced challenges never faced before. The pandemic closed down many aspects of rural life, and halted the WMBA's plans for shows and demonstrations. However, on a positive note, its use of social media increased significantly, and many buyers and vendors began to engage with the association on these platforms.

"Covid-19 ruled out all shows and demonstration days," says Will. "All promotion had to be via social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Our views and social media following increased significantly, helping to identify and pick up new and returning buyers for the association sales at all three centres."

Will's role is to assist buyers and vendors throughout the year, particularly during the lead up to and after the sales. This was difficult in 2020. He can help buyers purchase with confidence at association sales where inspection of stock is paramount. As a lamb producer and Welsh Mule buyer himself, Will can explain to others the care and commitment required to produce or use quality breeding sheep.

Exceptional

He considers the Welsh Mule to be an exceptional breeding ewe, capable of producing the finest finished lamb. It can be crossed with any breed of terminal sire – including Texel, Suffolk, Beltex or Charollais – to produce top-quality finished lamb carcasses.

In winter, as spring approaches, Will himself monitors all ewes for body condition with all breeding ewes scanned. Ewes are grouped according to scanning results and all sheep are fed silage and energy blocks. They are housed and are introduced to concentrates, starting off at 0.5kg a day.

Concentrates rations are gradually increased to 1kg a day, and Will takes photos and videos of how these ewes are performing to publicise on social media how well Welsh Mules perform as a breeding ewe. He uses the platforms to answer any questions or queries from interested parties and potential buyers on the Welsh Mule breed.

Hoggs are lambed in April, with the aim of all hoggs to be turned out with one lamb. If twins are born one lamb is pulled off and artificially reared on a milk machine for 34 days.

During the summer and into autumn, Will is involved in general sheep work such as tailing, drenching, and shearing. It is also the time to select lambs to be sold, which are all sold through Welshpool Livestock Market.

Will says he can produce good, finished lambs because Welsh Mules are prolific and have superior mothering instincts, with excellent milk availability, and a very high percentage of live lambs are reared to maturity.

Summer is also, typically, the time of the year to promote the Welsh Mule Association sales and Will would be usually expected to travel extensively to shows and open days to promote the breed. But not in 2020 – he spent more time on his phone or laptop than expected.

However the association did manage to run its association sales, albeit under Covid-19 restrictions, and it was held in Hereford for the first time due to the restrictions. It was quite a baptism of fire.

"I really enjoyed the association's sale day," says Will. "It is an exciting and busy time of the year. As a field officer, I need to be on hand to assist vendors and buyers if they need anything. I also coordinate the sale inspectors to ensure every lamb/ewe is inspected to the standard the association expects. During and after the sale, I am the first point of contact. And it is my role to help and deal with any queries that arise."

Committed

As a committed Welsh Mule buyer, Will also purchases yearling ewes and ewe lambs for himself at the association sales every year.

"It gives me confidence in the quality and value of the sheep available. I'm reassured by the association's efforts to present the best commercial breeding ewe. Mules have and always will be the ultimate commercial performing ewe, able to deliver and rear good crops of lambs. For example, I sold 10-week-old lambs out of Welsh Mules crossed with Texel and Beltex rams this year, which averaged 36kg and sold for £133 per head."

The WMBA looks forward to welcoming everyone to the 2021 sales. While shows, open days or demonstrations will be restricted, it hopes to get back into some form of normality and hold ewe lamb shows, at least, at the association's sales.

2021 sale dates

Welshpool	Wednesday 8th September (ewes) Thursday 9th September (ewe lambs) Thursday 7th October (ewes & ewe lambs)
Hereford	Friday 10th September (ewes & ewe lambs) Tuesday 12th October (ewes & ewe lambs)
Ruthin	Saturday 11th September (ewes & ewe lambs)

For further information please contact Will on 07854 600667 or email whejones@hotmail.com. You can also contact the Welsh Mules Breeder Association office on 01970 636688 or email info@welshmules.co.uk.



I wouldn't use anything else on my hoggs

The farming enterprise made the decision that tupping hoggs was commercially viable and would work well with the current farming system, allowing the business to produce its own replacements at a lower cost and with better genetic value.

It was important to select a tup that would be easy lambing and provide a good carcass. The farm had originally used other continental tups on its hoggs, but found the variation in lamb size and lamb quality was too great.

Lambs didn't have enough hybrid vigour. And when lambs are sold in large batches, skins, lamb size and the overall look of the pen is important. I found the other breeds weren't uniform in the pen.

We then made the decision to use a Berrichon ram on the hoggs. The first thing that drew me to the Berrichon was the skins and confirmation of the breed. The tups also had a great length and even bodies, to make for easy lambing, unlike the other breeds we had previously used.

Vigour

Using Berrichons, we lamb 400 hoggs – all unassisted. Their vigour was also outstanding. Lambs were quickly up and suckling and thriving out in the fields. Quite often the lambs would look after the hogg with their willingness to thrive.

The final decider was made on the Berrichon when putting large pens of lambs together – their skins and carcasses mixed well with our Texel and Lleyn lambs.

After a few years I also began to use Berrichons on the shearlings, as their skins make fantastic lambs. Overall, the move to Berrichons has been fantastic and it would take a good sales pitch to make me switch to anything else to tup a hogg with now. I would fully recommend them to any commercial sheep farmer for tupping their hoggs.

Mr Mackintosh, Cumbria.



Society sales 2021

Early First Choice Sale

Show & sale of males & females
Worcester Market, Saturday 10th July

Carlisle Sale

Show & sale of males & females
Borderway Mart, Friday 27th August

NSA Main Ram Sale

Show & sale of males & females
Builth Wells, Monday 20th September

Welshpool Multi Breed Ram Sale

Show & sale of rams
Welshpool Market, Thursday 30th September

In Lamb Ewe Sale

Show & sale of in-lamb ewes & ewe lambs
Welshpool Market, Saturday 6th November

In Lamb Ewe Sale

Sale of in-lamb ewes
Worcester Market, Saturday 4th December

Non-society sales

NSA South West Ram Sale

Exeter Market, Wednesday 18th August

Kelso Ram Sale

Kelso, Friday 10th September

For more information please contact the Secretary on 01989 770071, by email at berrichon@btconnect.com or visit www.berrichonsociety.com.

High Country Romneys: in search of the ELMS sheep



The phasing out of direct payments and introduction of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), with very little detail yet known, is a worrying prospect for farmers.

ELMS puts sustainability top of the agenda with options, such as arable reversion, low-input grassland and including livestock in arable rotations, opening the door for a type of sheep and system that can best utilise the diversity of forage produced up and down the country, writes Polly James.

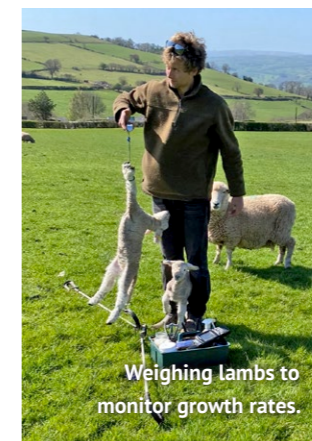
This reform may be a political matter, but the driver is undeniably coming from consumers and the public. The red-meat sector is now in the spotlight, so producing lamb with a minimal carbon footprint and chemical inventory, and with maximum welfare status, have to be core values if we are to tap into and profit from this demand for sustainability.

Low-input

At High Country Romneys, breeders Penny Chantler and Sam and Will Sawday believe the answer is in low-input genetics. "Low-input genetics from New Zealand Romneys fit perfectly with the direction of ELMS and we believe they will assure the environmental and financial sustainability of sheep production," says Will.

High Country Romneys (HCR) have been pursuing the low-input holy grail for 35 years, importing New Zealand genetics to drive a development programme with clear sustainability goals; a balance between robustness and productivity, and producing sheep that thrive on minimal resources.

The core area of interest for the team is the 'doing' traits. "Hardiness, condition-holding and disease resistance are fundamental to the success of a low-input system," says Sam. Penny adds: "ELMS will attract more extensive, forage-based systems, and 'doing' traits are the basis to ensure these systems function to their maximum potential."



Achieving this objective, animals are body condition scored during the year. This data is then fed into HCR's EBV suite, which then allows high performing animals to be selected and means that ewes can maintain condition through varied feed quality and weather conditions.



Resistance

In addition, continued work on worm resistance has substantially reduced HCR customers' use of drenches and, with their focus now on fly control, their ultimate goal is to make fly sprays redundant by using dag scoring EBVs, as well as selection on wool type and bare breeches, combined with hard culling.

Much of this has been made possible by recent ram imports with premier league performance in the 'doing' traits, as well as greatly improved productivity, particularly for growth and meat yield.

The most recent imports were from Forbes Cameron, Ngaputahi Station, and HCR hopes to import from there again this year. They also hope to import a Mount Linton Mainstay ram to integrate into their RomTex flock, which has attracted a lot of interest during the past five years.

"Our clients are seeing greatly improved productivity with this 50:50 cross, without compromising the fantastic ease of lambing and mothering ability of the NZ Romney," adds Will. "The sheep are multiple usage, primarily a maternal breed, and suited to lowland conditions. But we are seeing them being used regularly as a terminal ram in hill flocks."

Predicting the future is no easy feat, but it's looking increasingly likely practices such as cover cropping, deferred grazing, agro-forestry and meadow restoration will become commonplace under the carbon-sequestration umbrella.

The bottom line for sheep farmers is to find a sheep that not only meets the Government's call for environmental and sustainable meat production, but also meets their need for economic sustainability. The NZ Romney and RomTex looks well placed to do just that.

For further information please contact us on 01497 820304, email us at info@highcountryromneys.com or visit www.highcountryromneys.com.





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NSA next generation ambassador Fred says the future of his sheep enterprise is about maximising output from an integrated mix of grassland and arable cover crops in a sustainable, regenerative system.

Meticulous forage management combined with Innovis genetics are enabling him achieve his goals.

"It's all about maximising forage - both grazed grass and fodder crops, which are not only the cheapest form of feed, but also maintaining soil health and fertility. I firmly believe that sheep and arable - two specialist complementary enterprises working together are for real for the future.

Cover crops work out 30-40% cheaper in DM terms compared with silage, and ewes remain on these forage crops until March. Swapping for lighter Innovis genetics - Aberfield crosses and Highlander, with a 65-70kg mature weight, I've been able to step up stocking rate to 13.5 ewes/ha on heavy clay.

Nowadays I'm able to lamb these hardy ewes outdoors, as few as 5% require any form of intervention and 90% lamb within the first three weeks. I'm farming sheep that look after themselves. I think I've established a good template for continuing to grow the business and I'm currently targeting a minimum 2,000 ewes."

Lambs from Fred's current 1300 ewe flock finish to 19-20kg target weight and grade R3L or better within 170-200 days, whilst the entire crop is finished off forage by end of year.

Fred Love, Retford (2021) Aberfield and Highlander genetics

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2021 SALE DATES		
Online Sales	www.innovis.org.uk/buyonline/	3 May - 16 Jul
Exeter	Kivells Exeter Livestock Centre, EX2 8FD	30 Jul
Aberystwyth	Peithyll Capel Dewi, Aberystwyth, SY23 3HU	5 Aug
Ross-on-Wye	RG & RB Williams Ross Auction Centre, HR9 7QF	14 Aug
St Boswells	Harrison and Hetherington St Boswells Mart, TD6 0PP	26 Aug
Great From Grass	Fearn Farm Fearn, IV20 1TL	27 Aug
Carlisle	Harrison & Hetherington Borderway Mart, Rosehill, CA1 2RS	30 Aug
Exeter	Kivells Exeter Livestock Centre, EX2 8FD	3 Sept
Stirling	Caledonian Marts Stirling Auction Centre, FK7 7LS	4 Sept
Aberystwyth	Peithyll Capel Dewi, Aberystwyth, SY23 3HU	9 Sept

Insurance can help mitigate impact of Covid-19

By Alan Tate-Smith, Towergate towergate farm insurance

As lockdown continues to ease and life slowly returns to normal, the inevitable increase in the use of public footpaths will follow – as will interactions between people and livestock.

While this is a year-round challenge faced by sheep farmers across the country, the impact of 2020's lockdown had some unexpected consequences on farms that may be even worse this year.

There is the potential for larger numbers of people visiting the countryside compared to previous years. Foreign travel restrictions and the increasing popularity of 'staycations' are making the countryside the go to holiday destination in 2021, with rural holiday accommodation seeing a boom in bookings. More visitors means more people using footpaths and, as a result, livestock/public interactions will increase.

The second and more unexpected result of lockdown has been a huge increase in dog ownership – with many people become first-time owners. Many of these dog owners will be inexperienced and will take young and untrained dogs onto stocked land.

Looking at this from an insurance perspective, what does this mean for sheep farmers, and what actions can be taken to help avoid issues? The answer falls into two main categories: your liabilities, relating to damage and injury caused by your livestock; and physical damage to your livestock.

Liabilities

Beginning first with what is known as third-party liability, this is where the public liability section of insurance kicks in. If sheep get onto a road and hit by a car, for example, the sheep's owner would be liable for the losses suffered by the driver – even if the sheep escaped and got onto the road because someone else, possibly a walker, left a gate open. Only if you can prove who left the gate open could your insurance company look to recover their losses from that party, but in reality this is extremely rare.

Such claims can be very high value, particularly when personal injury is involved, with ever escalating settlements to cover cost of care, loss of earnings and pain and suffering. Most farm insurance now covers public liability to £10m as standard, which should be considered a minimum. But it is worth checking your policy to make sure.

Moving onto your own livestock, the two most common scenarios are straying and worrying. The straying peril in livestock insurance would cover the loss of animals hit by a car on the road. Cover is provided for fatal injury, as in the animal dies or is euthanised on humane grounds, and will look to compensate the value of that animal at the time of the loss. From a sheep farming point of view, bear in mind it is likely there will be an excess to pay, and this will probably mean there has to be a loss of several animals before a claim becomes viable.

The problem of livestock worrying is more complex, both in terms of insurance and because it tends to be a far more upsetting and emotive event. The aforementioned rise in dog ownership and increased use of the countryside for recreation is sure to impact the number of sheep worrying cases.

Solutions

Taking steps to avoid such incidents would be the best solution, so consider putting signs up in fields with livestock asking dog owners to keep their animals on a lead. Or avoiding particularly vulnerable stock, such as in-lamb ewes, grazing areas heavily used by dog walkers.

That said, we do not live in a perfect world and, unfortunately, livestock worrying will happen, with financial losses being potentially significant. So how can insurance help? Proving who is responsible is often extremely difficult, even if there is strong suspicion. Dog owners will tend to be very defensive for fear of losing their pet, which leads to stalemate in most cases.

If liability can be proved, or is admitted, a claim can usually be made against the owner's household insurance, which will probably cover their liability for damage caused by domestic pets.

The other option available to farmers is to insure their own livestock against worrying as an extension to their own policy. Be aware that this cover is relatively expensive compared to the more standard livestock perils, due primarily to the fact the farmer has very little control over preventing incidents and this represents a greater risk of claims.

As with any additional cover, discuss the pros and cons with your insurance broker, and ask them to provide you with a quotation. Only when you know the costs and benefits of cover can you make an informed business decision about the risks to your business.

An increase in dog ownership is contributing to a rise in sheep worrying incidents.



Does the UK have a resilient and competitive sheep sector?

By Nick Allen, British Meat Producers Association



Many sheep farmers will have been celebrating the stellar rise in lamb prices during the first quarter of 2021.

But an alarm bell rang recently when Ipswich-based butcher George Debman reported he was reducing the amount of lamb he stocks in his shop, because his customers are not prepared to pay the price he has to charge to cover his costs. He also predicts prices will rise even further.

Increased demand for lamb, combined with an expected 4% fall in lamb throughput in 2021, have combined to create a perfect storm for lamb prices, which have reached unprecedented levels since Christmas.

Squeeze

Mr Debman provides a stark illustration of the price squeeze. Pre-Brexit he was paying around £115 per lamb, at the beginning of April the same lamb cost £145 and by mid-April it cost £185. This equates to a lamb price of £17.50/kg for customers, to cover his costs. It was around £11.50 in March.

The challenge for the sheep sector is lamb is now the most expensive protein on the market. It's even comparing unfavourably to some high-end fish products. On top of that, processors selling into the EU are now facing extra export costs and time delays.

The danger is that UK consumers start looking at alternatives and EU customers start sourcing cheaper and more agile suppliers from within the EU. According to the latest HMRC trade data, UK exports of sheep meat fell 28% year-on-year to the lowest February export volume in at least five years.

While overall imports fell by 8% year-on-year in February, a telling figure is the 11% and 17% uplift in imports from New Zealand and Australia respectively, which is most likely due to tighter domestic supply and higher UK prices.

Despite global sheep meat prices being at record highs, some industry analysts, including Thomas Elder Markets' Matt Dalgliesh, are predicting demand, particularly from the developing nations of South East Asia and Africa, will continue to grow. Australia and New Zealand stand to benefit most from this because they dominate the sheep meat export market, accounting for 66% of total global trade. The UK is a distant third, with 8% of global trade. UK producers must keep prices under control in order to compete for this expanding global trade.

This raises the question of how the UK sheep sector is placed to remain competitive. A significant driver is how UK Government subsidies are set to affect the industry. This is particularly pertinent as the Government prepares to shift away from straight subsidies and towards paying farmers for public goods, through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme.

A recent report from Sheffield University suggests most sheep farming in the UK would not be profitable without subsidies. It goes on to claim a better use of land used for sheep farming would be to grow trees and sell carbon offsetting certificates. This would depend on the market price of carbon but, if the university's calculations are correct, the closing price for carbon in early May 2021, for example, of €50.35/t would more than cover the costs.

Fragility

But there is a much bigger issue at play. The coronavirus pandemic coupled with the disruption to trade caused by Brexit have exposed the fragility of food supply chains and served to highlight food security as a national priority. It has become clear a viable, robust domestic food supply chain is vital to the UK and, between British meat processors and the farmers who supply them, we've proved that we have just that.

We shouldn't throw this away. Rather than rushing headlong into becoming businesses that gain income from selling carbon offsets instead of food, government incentives should help farmers to find a blended business model that can potentially deliver both. It would preserve our communities, farming traditions, the countryside and, most importantly, Britain's future food security.

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REFERENCES: 1. Wales Against Resistance Development (WARD) Final Report 2015. 2. scops.org.uk © 2021 Elanco or its affiliates. The diagonal bar logo is a trademark of Elanco or its affiliates. PM-UK-21-0500



If lamb prices are considered too high by consumers, they will look at alternative meats.



Welsh project shows the grass really is greener



By Laura Howells, HCC

Grass-fed red meat is growing in popularity with consumers, as society becomes more focused on food production systems and the associated health benefits.

Grass is typically the prime feed source for lambs in Wales, with farmers making the most of the iconic rugged pasture-land, overall topography and climate.

There are environmental benefits to livestock being reared on grass, compared to those being fed concentrates or grain-based rations, such as grazing being advantageous for biodiversity and better for soil health. But what are the actual health benefits to grass-fed lamb for consumers? A project led by HCC has been exploring that with some interesting results.

Quality

The Welsh Lamb Meat Quality project is designed to investigate markers of quality for lamb and understand what consumers want from lamb products. The project is investigating many of the factors that can affect consumers' preferences, such as breed type, age and maturation time. But it is also going beyond eating quality and aims to uncover the health benefits of grass-fed lamb.

One trial, in particular, will investigate how different lamb diets affect lambs' nutritional profiles, in a long-term bid to ensure lamb stays

relevant to consumer needs in an evolving protein market and changing societal needs.

The project began in 2018 and is one strand of HCC's Red Meat Development Programme, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government, to ensure the long-term prosperity of the red meat sector in Wales.

In 2020, the project focused on lamb-finishing diets and ran trials comparing the nutritional make-up of lambs finished on grass and grain. The analysis firstly concentrated on amino acids – the building blocks which make up protein. They are a key part of the human diet and help the body with many key functions such as muscle growth and repair, with several 'essential' amino acids being only obtainable through the diet.

The study revealed grass-finished lambs contained higher levels concentrations of amino acids, including five essential amino acids – leucine, lysine, threonine, tyrosine and valine – compared to concentrate-fed lambs. These particular essential amino acids all contribute to muscle growth and structure, energy production, immune function, wound healing, calcium absorption, and skin and connective tissue structure. The nutritional make-up of grass-fed lambs was also found to be more consistent compared to their concentrate-fed counterparts.

Ernie Richards and Stuart Morris run a 1,000-ewe, 350-acre (140ha) upland farm near Hay on Wye, Herefordshire, and theirs was one of the farms who supplied lambs for the diet trial.

Ernie, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, monitored lamb growth weights and provided soil samples as part of the trial.

"It was great to be involved in the trial and this piece of research, which will give the industry more of an understanding of the benefits of grass-fed lamb," says Ernie. "Our grass-based system allows us to produce high quality Welsh Lamb while making the most of the land and natural resources we have. We're looking forward to seeing how the project progresses and are happy to have been involved in this project, which will push the industry forward."

Consumers

This is great news and not only for consumers, but also for farmers and businesses working across the supply chain.

Further nutritional analysis is planned for 2021 and the project will be investigating omega-3 levels in grass-fed lamb, as well as zinc and iron content. Further taste panels will also be conducted across the UK, allowing HCC's research team to understand what consumers think of the taste of lamb, and to give consumers the facts on how Welsh Lamb is produced and what its nutritional benefits are.

While the project will continue to understand consumers' relationships with lamb and raise its profile in the UK market, farmers can be assured that by feeding and finishing their flocks on grass, they are producing a quality product for consumers that is truly natural and nutritious.

Partnership model expands genetic exports, despite pandemic

By Marcus Bates, UKECP

When exporters talk about market access, we often assume this is something Government has to do and it's out of our hands.

There is also the perception it takes too long, and other countries find it easier to get access to new markets. There are countries without the challenges of scrapie and Schmallenberg but, when you compare like with like, the UK is doing a pretty good job of opening new markets for sheep genetics.

One reason for this is the partnership model developed by the UK Export Certification Partnership (UKECP). This allows the sheep industry to work with the Government through the Department for International Trade (DIT) to promote our world-class genetics and stimulate demand while, at the same time, helping Defra to develop workable certificates.



Romney Sheep on display in the British Ambassador's garden in Montevideo.

Partnership

The Covid-19 pandemic has served to reinforced the need to work together through UKECP. In 2017, UKECP published its first strategic action plan. A meeting in London, organised by the DIT Agritech team, brought together staff from embassies from across the whole of Latin America and they told us about the huge demand for UK breeding sheep. At that time we had no access to any of these markets.

An intensive programme of outward and inward missions excited importers about buying UK sheep so they would put pressure on their own governments to open their markets. Mexico was an early success and then we set about the difficult business of prying open doors in South America.

New markets opened during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Country	Species	Commodity	Date
Australia	Sheep	Semen and embryos	Mar 2020
Australia	Goats	Semen	Mar 2020
Argentina	Sheep	Semen and embryos	Oct 2020
Brazil	Sheep	Semen and embryos	Sep 2020
Brazil	Goats	Semen and embryos	May 2021
Chile	Sheep and goats	Semen and embryos	May 2021
Paraguay	Sheep	Embryos	Mar 2021
Taiwan	Sheep and goats	Semen	Mar 2020

Thanks to the support of AHDB and DIT, UK sheep breeders were able to visit Brazil, Columbia and Uruguay. With promises of real progress on certification, we were well on the way to setting up an inward mission for buyers for the summer of 2020. UKECP had appointed a team based in Brazil to co-ordinate the mission – Denise Pellin, a former British Consul in Brazil, and Daniel Benitez, a sheep consultant with contacts across the whole region.

The pandemic, however, stopped travel and a different approach was required. Thanks to continued support from AHDB, UKECP has been able to retain Denise and Daniel and develop a new strategy of virtual engagement from the UK, combined with country visits by the team. Denise and Daniel have helped us follow progress on certification while, at the same time, building relationships with the breeders and breeders' organisations across the region.

Four breeds have been identified as priorities – Dorset, Hampshire, Suffolk and Texel. A week-

long visit to Colombia has enabled us to move forwards with completing a much shorter version of the Risk Assessment Questionnaire, which is always the first step towards a new export health certificate. At the Expointer event in Brazil, the UKECP team held meetings with all the key associations and institutions and established that, as well as the supply of genetics, there is also a real opportunity for training and sharing of expertise.

Chilean link

A webinar event was held with the Dorset Breeders of Chile, with James Royan presenting with Signet's Sam Boon. We also heard from five Chilean breeders about their needs, and from the Chilean National Research Association. Paraguay was next on the list for a webinar. Unfortunately this was postponed due to Covid-19, but it is now being rescheduled.

So what has all this activity achieved? The table shows how far we have come while the pandemic rages around the world. As well as huge progress in South America, we have opened up Australia and Taiwan. Trade has already begun and, as Covid-19 vaccination programmes are rolled out, UKECP is well placed to receive inward missions and see exports taking off in these new markets.

As well as the business opportunities offered by the opening of Australia and Taiwan, access to these markets for the UK can be used as examples for China, which remains an important longer-term priority.

The UK team – comprising Chris Jackson, Ian Cumming and Rob Grinnall – continues to work with NSA, AHDB, DIT and Defra to prise open doors around the world. And we will be launching a new export-promotion website to back up our efforts.

Payments on way – and a call for more 2020 clip



British Wool has confirmed all producers who delivered wool to it in 2020 will receive a payment.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on British Wool has been well documented, with the business going through the most challenging 12 months in its history.

The UK's wool scouring plants were closed in March 2020, the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown, and manufacturers stopped processing. Exports were also put on hold. British Wool faced a situation where, in effect, there was no market for the product and as a result, closed the 2019 season with 11m kg of stock unsold.

British Wool moved to online auctions and, in January 2021, announced a restructuring of the grading depot network. The savings equate to a reduction in handling costs of around 7p/kg, which will translate into additional value for producers in the medium to long-term.

Overhang

As the 2021 shearing season gathers pace, British Wool's stock overhang from 2019 has been successfully cleared and, as the market starts to recover, British Wool will also close the 2020 clip year with a minimal stock position. Since February auction prices have also started to recover. The average auction price is now around 67p/kg, compared to 50-55p/kg for most of the past 12 months.

"Despite the challenging year we have had, British Wool is still making a payment to producers for their 2020 clip," says Andrew Hogley, British Wool Chief Executive. "The total return averages 15p/kg. This is still a long way below where we need it to be but we are optimistic we will see a further price recovery through the course of the next year."

"A healthier stock position, reduced cost base and recovering auction prices puts British Wool in much stronger position to deliver better value for its producers in 2021."

Restructure

"Also, following the completion of the restructure, we have enhanced our service offer by opening a number of new collection sites this season. We are abolishing onward carriage fees at all of our collection sites from this season. And British Wool's shearing courses are also resuming this year. We see this as an essential part of the support we provide for the industry."

Jim Robertson, a Dumfriesshire-based sheep farmer and British Wool Chairman, adds: "British Wool is a cooperative and we firmly believe the collaborative marketing of the UK wool clip is the best way to deliver value for wool producers. This principal is even more essential today than it was when British Wool was established in 1950. The wool clip needs to be sorted and amalgamated into commercial weights if it is to be used by manufacturers and achieve value for producers."

"In 2020 we handled less wool due to a small number of producers not seeing value in delivering their wool. This, in turn, had a negative impact on our operating cost per kg."

"The more wool we handle the more cost effective our operations become. This, in turn, allows us to return more value to all producers. Every kg of wool British Wool handles makes an important contribution to supporting your organisation. It also ensures we can continue to provide a high standard of service to all producers, drive demand for British wool with our customers and downstream manufacturers, work with universities and industry on new product development and, finally, continue to represent your best interests as wool producers."

"I'd encourage all producers to support British Wool and for those who have wool from the 2020 clip still on their farm to deliver this into British Wool this season."

Natural Fibre Company builds on its legacy

Having long been supportive of the work of the Natural Fibre Company, NSA was saddened to hear of the sudden passing of its founder, Sue Blacker, in April this year.

Sue acquired the wool mill in 2004 and relocated it to Cornwall, where it pioneered work to bring scouring, spinning and dyeing under one roof. As well as selling yarn from Sue's own flock to destinations all over the world, the Natural Fibre Company became a contract spinner for various small wool producers.

As such, Sue was considered to have kick-started a minor revolution in the textile industry and was considered a great friend to many different people within the community of small shepherd flocks and wool enthusiasts.

Sue disposed of the company in December 2019 and was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour just 12 months later. Her legacy will stand the test of time, with the Natural Fibre Company continuing to grow and invest further in research and development under its new ownership.

Read more at www.thenaturalfibre.co.uk/history.



Fewer farmers sending their clip to British Wool in 2020 meant less wool was handled.



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Damara is just one breed of fat-tailed sheep, which store body fat in their tails.

From East to West – fat-tailed sheep at home in Wales

By Rachael Porter, contributor

Fat-tailed sheep could represent a viable 'niche' opportunity for UK sheep farmers, if the results of an ongoing European Innovation Partnership (EIP) project are anything to go by.

Not only is the UK's first pure and crossbred fat-tailed Damara flock thriving in our temperate climate, but initial taste tests have had the thumbs up from several chefs and consumers.

Anglesey-based sheep farmer Peter Williams hit on the idea to develop a flock of Damara sheep and explore their potential to supply a niche market after a Farming Connect meeting in 2018.

He says: "During the event, there were discussions about the Middle East and it brought back memories of my time working there in the 1990s on a 30,000-head sheep farm near Riyadh

in Saudi Arabia. I was reminded of the wonderful dishes I ate while I was there. The lamb tasted different, and I've not tasted anything like it since. And it got me thinking that perhaps it was time to find out if there was a market for that type of lamb in the UK, and to try something different."

Replication

Mr Williams also worked on sheep farms in New Zealand and Australia before returning home to work on the family farm in 1993. But it's the flock of Romney ewes he worked with in Riyadh, which were imported from Australia and crossed with Saudi Arabia's native Damara fat-tailed rams, which he knew he and his friend Bedwyr Jones, who farms in Snowdonia, had to replicate in the UK.

"There are many types of 'fat tailed' sheep and, as their name suggests, their body fat is largely

deposited in their tails," explains Mr Williams. "Yet they are all known for their lean meat, which has a distinctive taste and is particularly suited to producing authentic Middle Eastern dishes.

"And, I knew from my experience of working overseas, the meat from these sheep breeds is particularly popular among ethnic communities."

Mr Williams and Mr Jones were already worried about the implications of Brexit in 2016 when they were developing their idea. "We'd been discussing possible diversification enterprises, which could offer additional income streams to future-proof our businesses," he says.

After a considerable amount of market research, they felt confident there was a gap in the market for selling speciality lamb to ethnic minorities in the UK.

Speciality

"Conversations with several retailers, restaurateurs and abattoirs soon convinced me this speciality meat, already popular in many countries outside the Middle East, could also appeal to a niche market in some of the UK's biggest multi-cultural cities. So Bedwyr and I decided to take the idea forward, with additional technical advice from retired vet Tricia Sutton."

They asked Farming Connect for help and were advised to apply for support through the Welsh EIP. This offers funding and expert guidance for developing new ideas and innovative projects on farms.

EIP consultant Geraint Hughes has been working closely with the pair since 2017. He helped to submit an EIP group application for financial support and also supplied the additional

specialist knowledge needed to turn their ideas into reality.

In early 2018, Mr Williams and Mr Jones became the first farmers to bring the fat-tailed breed to the UK, importing embryos from Australia and using AI to breed from Damara ewes they produced.

Mr Williams says there was a huge amount of red tape and paperwork, which needed to be approved by several authorities from different countries, just to import the embryos.

They have already produced six pure-bred Damara sheep – three rams and three ewes. And they welcomed their first two batches of both pure-breed and cross-breed Damara lambs in 2020.

Insemination

The pair produced cross-bred lambs using frozen Damara semen, also imported from Australia, on their flocks of mainly Texel, Lleyln and Romney cross ewes in December 2019. More than 50 ewes were successfully inseminated, with a 75% success rate resulting in more than 65 healthy lambs during that first year.

The ewes, rams and their progeny are thriving and they've also seen a healthy crop this spring, with the flock lambing again in April and May. "They've adapted well to our environment, but I expected they would," says Mr Williams. "The breed

is from a region with extremes of cold and heat, so the sheep take the UK climate in their stride.

"They've lambed easily with little assistance and lamb growth rates match those of native breeds. So, on a practical level, the breed and cross-bred lambs thrive in the UK climate and our sheep farming systems.

Optimism

"We're optimistic we can now steadily increase numbers. And then we can start to set up our supply outlets, both directly and through wholesale buyers."

He adds that timing, particularly in 2020, wasn't great due to Covid-19. "It limited the face-to-face contact we needed with potential buyers and consumers at a time when we really wanted to engage with the market.

"But the chefs who have taken our lamb have all said how good it is – particularly when it comes to making authentic Middle Eastern dishes such as tagines. It definitely has the taste we hoped it would – it's sweeter than traditional lamb and also leaner. The breed stores more fat in its tail area and there's less intramuscular fat.

"The first taste tests have exceeded our expectations – and also took me back to those dishes I was eating in Saudi Arabia 30 years ago," says Mr Williams.

"There's definitely a market here in the UK for the lamb – we just have to work hard to produce enough lamb to meet it. So that's what we're now setting out to do."

He adds that they have more taste tests planned for when this spring's lambs are finished. "Covid-19 put the brakes on that all in 2020 and we were pretty limited with our first taste tests. So that's the big push for summer 2021 and we're excited to see the reactions of more chefs and a larger and broader tasting panel. It will also be good to see people face to face and talk to them about our flock and the lamb we're producing."



The lamb is proving popular with chefs and performing well in taste tests.



Damaras have adapted well to the UK climate.

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FOR FLOCK'S SAKE

Let's stop scab together

By Hazel Rice, Moredun



As announced in the previous edition of this magazine, an initiative has been launched using serological testing to improve the control of sheep scab within England's hot-spot areas.

It follows a successful bid for Defra funding via the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), by a group of industry experts, to demonstrate the effectiveness of community-led approaches to improve the control of sheep scab.

The two-year 'For Flock's Sake' project is being led by Stewart Burgess of Moredun, independent consultant Lesley Stubbings and Richard Wall of Bristol University, with partners including NSA, ADAS, the Farmer Network and Flock Health.

It will offer participating farmers a unique combination of on-farm advice, best practice training and free blood testing using the sheep scab ELISA test developed by Moredun.

This co-ordinated approach will be used to demonstrate the control of sheep scab in areas where it currently presents a significant problem. It will focus on three specific areas of England, within the North West, the Midlands and the South West.

Infectious

Sheep scab, a highly infectious disease caused by the parasitic mite *Psoroptes ovis*, costs the UK sheep industry between £70m and £200m each year and has remained a significant health, welfare and productivity for flocks since the 1950s, when it was re-introduced via imported sheep.

UK populations of sheep scab mite now have proven resistance to one of the main treatment groups, injectable macrocyclic lactones (MLs), so it is imperative the industry make concerted effort to bring this disease under control.

The project is designed for farmers who are willing to work in clusters with their neighbours and their vets in testing, sharing results and undertaking the practical elements required to bring sheep scab under control.

The work will be co-ordinated by local industry groups already working with sheep farmers in each focus area, including the Farmer

Network in the North West, ADAS in the Midlands and NSA in the South West, which will increase participation.

Farm vets will be heavily involved with their clients within the project, and will be working closely with the regional coordinators within the clusters.

This is an exciting community-led approach to sheep-scab control, with fantastic opportunities involving a team of experts, working collaboratively with farmers to bring this serious disease under control.

Initiative

"This exciting new initiative gives farmers the opportunity to get ahead of the curve in terms of scab control, setting a new benchmark for how we deal with the disease in the future," says Dr Burgess.

Mr Wall adds: "After 50 years of attempts to manage this disease, approaches used to date have clearly failed and it is time to apply some fresh thinking based on focused management in known scab hot spots."

"It is fantastic to see this project come to fruition, having been first proposed to Defra by the SCOPS group in 2019," says Ms Stubbings.

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer, Christine Middlemiss, also welcomes the scab project. "The unique combination of on-farm advice, training and blood testing will support sheep farmers in their fight against this disease."

Find out more about the project, including NSA's involvement, at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-for-flocks-sake.

Sheep scab hot-spot areas

If you are interested in participating, please contact the coordinator in your respective region:

- **North West** Contact the Farmer Network Call 01768 868615 or email admin@thefarmernetwork.co.uk
- **South West** Through its local network, NSA has identified an area suitable to deliver the project aims. For further information please contact Sean Riches on sean@nationalsheep.org.uk
- **Midlands** Contact Kate Phillips on katephillips58@aol.com or Karen Wheeler on karen.wheeler@adas.co.uk

Sheep scabs costs the UK industry £70-£200m annually.



Photo credit: Neil Sargison

Community-led project demonstrates improved scab-control methods

NSA has welcomed the launch of the 'For Flock's Sake' project and looks forward to coordinating the work in South West England. With a strong regional presence, NSA has already identified an area suitable to deliver the project aims and, working with people already on the ground, will be coordinating the recruitment into appropriate clusters.

Given its role throughout the UK, NSA is also ideally placed to extrapolate learnings from the project to elsewhere in the region and throughout England, as well as linking it with and comparing it to existing initiatives in the devolved UK nations.

NSA Policy & Technical Officer Sean Riches says: "Sheep scab continues to be a health and economic problem with significant costs to the UK sheep industry. Outbreaks are often caused through actions outside the control of farmers, which is why co-ordinated control programmes need to be implemented.

"The specific localised recruitment means in no way is it a national eradication programme. But the partnership approach, with strong execution, gives it the potential to be a platform for further wider-scale initiatives. And it will hopefully lead to even greater things in the future, which is why NSA was so keen to be involved."

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After weaning, return lambs to the field they came from.



Top tips for lamb-weaning success

By Annie Kerr, Paragon Veterinary Group



With weaning on the horizon, now is the ideal time to look at the factors key to its success.

Prior to weaning, there are four important steps to take. The first is to weigh lambs to check growth rates – targets are 300g/day for the first two months, with a 20kg liveweight target at eight weeks old.

Speak to your vet about faecal worm egg counts, to determine if lambs need worming or treatment for coccidiosis. And discuss the most suitable product to use, if required, with your vet.

Vaccinating against clostridial disease and pasteurella is also advisable. From three weeks old, lambs should receive two injections, each of 2ml, separated by an interval of four to six weeks. And lambs should also be given trace-element supplementation, if required.

Immaturity

Weaning is a stressful time, so take steps to reduce this as much as possible. At weaning lambs and ewes should be separated, with lambs sent back to the field they came from so they are familiar with their surroundings and can easily find the water trough.

Due to the immaturity of the lamb's digestive system at birth, it can take up to three weeks for the rumen to transition onto a new feed type. Evidence shows lambs perform better on feed they have 'experienced' with their mothers.

Ewes should be taken out of sight and sound of the lambs to minimise calling to each other.

Management tasks, such as vaccination or worming, should be performed a few weeks before or after weaning. The stress caused at weaning can impede the immune response, particularly to vaccines, thus increasing the lamb's susceptibility to disease.

Ewes should be turned out onto bare pasture or housed in a clean shed for 48 hours after weaning, to ensure their udders have dried up with minimal chances of infection. Watching for signs of mastitis is important and prompt treatment, with an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory, may be necessary.

A couple of weeks post weaning, ewes should be inspected for any signs of mastitis. A hard bag, for example, may indicate there has been damage to the mammary tissue. These ewes should not be bred from again. Their teeth should be checked for broken mouths, which is an indicator of age and will impede their ability to eat. Feet should

be checked for any lesions and ewes should be bearing weight evenly on all four hooves. Any underlying lameness issues will make them less likely to stand for the tup at the next mating season.

Any ewes that had a vaginal prolapse should be clearly marked and culled, as these sheep are more likely to have a vaginal prolapse the following year.

Growth

Ewe BCS can negatively affect lamb growth if it is not correct, as the ewes will be competing with the lambs for grass. Overfat and lean ewes will underperform, so assessing ewe body condition score at weaning allows time for condition to be altered pre-tupping.

Split ewes into thin, fit and fat groups to feed accordingly. It can take seven or eight weeks for a ewe to gain one body condition score on

Industry targets for lamb losses. (Source: AHDB)

Key performance indicator (KPI)	Industry target
% empty ewes at scanning (A)	<2%
Lamb losses from scanning to birth (B-C)	<5%
Lamb losses from birth to turnout (C-D)	<5%
Lamb losses from turnout to weaning (D-E)	<3%
Lamb losses from scanning to rearing (B-E)	<13%

unrestricted grazing, and 1.0 body condition score is about 13% of bodyweight (so 9kg for a 70kg ewe). Ewes tupped at the correct BCS tend to have lambs with better birth weights the following season.

Investigating why ewes are lean, particularly if there are several in the flock, is recommended. Faecal egg counts assess worm or fluke burdens. And also check for Johne's disease or maedi visna, via blood sampling, as these may also be why ewes are thin.

As animals age, their feed-conversion efficiency declines. So younger animals should be fed higher quality forage, where possible. High-grass digestibility is key to growth potential – routinely measuring and controlling sward height is important. It is more efficient to feed lambs to ensure they are achieving good early growth, compared to feeding hard post weaning.

In a set-stocking situation, target sward height should be 4-6cm. Where grass height is above or below this, minimise losses in lamb performance by supplementary feeding or fencing off additional fields for silage. Consider growing forage crops for finishing lambs if grass species makes it difficult to keep highly digestible feed ahead of lambs.

Lambs with lower birth weights will need more energy to grow to the desired finishing weight.

Ewes with a low BCS often give birth to smaller lambs, and carrying out pre-lambing bloods and assessing BCS before lambing is important to avoid this issue.

Investigate

Slower growing lambs also take longer to reach finishing weight. Lambs achieving a daily liveweight gain of 100g need twice as much energy to reach the same weight as those growing at 300g per day. Reasons why lambs are slow growing should be investigated.

Common causes are:

- Nematodirus (black scour).
- Round worms.
- Scald.
- Pasteurellosis.
- Joint ill or navel ill.

You cannot manage what you do not measure, so it is important to pinpoint where losses occur during the production cycle in order to improve performance each year. Recording events at and around lambing offers invaluable insight (see table). Key figures to record include:

- Number of ewes scanned empty.
- Scanning percentage.

- Lambing percentage (number of lambs born alive).
- Number of lambs turned out.
- Number of lambs sold.

Weaning lambs is a critical time and attention to detail ensures stress is reduced and growth rates are maximised. The longer lambs are kept on farm, the more they cost to keep. Maximising efficiency by controlling preventable diseases is key to profitability.



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Ewe and lamb condition and weight will help to inform weaning decisions.

Planning is key to maintaining lamb performance post-weaning

By Liz Genever, contributor

Planning for optimum lamb performance next year starts with the decisions made around weaning this season.

Weaning is a vital tool for the management of both ewes and lambs, and because each year is different getting the timing right is important.

Ewe body condition is the driver and underpins performance of ewes and lambs up to eight weeks of age. It is a clear indicator of how well ewes have been fed in early lactation. The challenge with this year's dry and then wet spring is that body condition score (BCS) may be lower than ideal.

The target is for lambs to average around 20kg liveweight at eight weeks of age. Measuring

weights, even on a proportion of the lamb crop, and a condition score at this stage is useful to understand how the ewes are performing. If lambs fall short of their weight target at eight weeks old, they do not make up the deficit later on. Setting targets and monitoring performance against the targets are vital.

Competition

So what influences timing? As lambs head towards 12 weeks of age, the amount of milk ewes are producing has dropped, as has their tolerance for allowing their lambs to suckle. Therefore lambs are getting most of their energy and protein from grass, other forages or creep feed. The ewes start to compete with their lambs for access to the best bits of grazing. This is one

of the trigger points for weaning, particularly if grass quality and/or quantity is low.

Another trigger point is ewe body condition. It takes between four and six weeks of unrestricted grazing for a ewe to gain one body condition score. So if they are thin (BCS 2 or below for lowland sheep) they need more time to recover before the next tupping. It also means you have a group of fit ewes that can be used to reset pastures, which may have lost quality in the late spring or early summer.

It is important to have good quality feed to wean lambs on to. For some farmers, this is specialist finishing crops, like multi-species, herbal or red clover.

For other farms, groups of lambs are managed on the fields they have been reared on with the

ewes removed. This can help as the lambs are familiar with the field, but needs to be dependent on pasture quality and worm challenge.

The target for an average weaning weight (around 90 days) is 30kg liveweight, with most farms being in the high 20s. This is equivalent to a daily liveweight gain of 280g from birth. If creep is being fed, this target needs to be increased.

Rotational grazing

Grazing management for weaned lambs is also important. Weaned lambs should be managed to allow them to choose the best bits out of fields to ensure good growth rates. This can be easier to manage if the lambs are in a rotation. A group of thin ewes can be run behind them to reset pastures, which means the lambs are not being worked too hard.

For rotational grazing systems, lambs should go into grass field at 8-10cm (2,000-2,200kgDM/ha) and out at around 6cm (1,750kgDM/ha), with ewes or cattle following to tidy up. The rotation should be managed to allow for a rest period of 24-30 days.

If specialist crops are available, it is worth remembering lambs can take two weeks to transition to their new diet, as the rumen needs to adjust. It may not be an advantage for lambs close to finishing to be moved onto novel crops.

Prioritise the middle-weight group of lambs onto these crops because these will make the most of them and, as lambs are sold, lambs from the lighter groups can be added.

It's also important to check for minerals and trace elements. Dry matter intake not only contains energy, protein and fibre, it also contains the key mineral elements to support good production and productivity. Some mineral and trace element issues are driven by poor dry matter availability.

In preparation for weaning, it is important to check whether additional supplementation of minerals and trace elements are needed. Information from previous years can be used to indicate risks – but if breeds, fields or crops have changed it may be worth investigating further.

Nutrients

Working with your vet or local merchant, forage samples from fields lambs are grazing, and are planned to graze, are useful when it comes to understanding the availability of the nutrients. If this flags up issues, blood samples could be taken from animals, ideally before weaning, so any deficits can be corrected.

These could be used to decide the best course of action, be it a bolus, mineralised creep feed, or a drench if lambs are close to finish.

Herbal leys offer good quality feed for weaning lambs.



NSA webinar

NSA hosted a webinar on maintaining lamb performance post-weaning as part of the launch of the Register of Sheep Advisers. This is a new initiative from NSA and BASIS. It is a continuous development programme for sheep advisers to demonstrate their professional status and build their network and knowledge. A recording of the webinar is available on the RoSA website at www.sheepadvisors.co.uk. More on page 26.

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The post-lambing period is a good time to review flock health management.

Plan, prevent protect – is your vet a Farm Vet Champion?

By Philippa Page, Flock Health flockhealthltd

As we move on from lambing for another year, now is a good time to catch up with your vet to take stock, to consider the issues your flock faced and identify areas that require focus to optimise lambs' ongoing performance up to weaning.

Important factors to consider are the inputs and extra costs required during the lambing period, as well as medicine use.

Antibiotic use is an area the industry has to keep assessing because the statistics are worrying. The 2014 O'Neill report shows, by 2050, the number of human deaths due to antimicrobial resistance will outnumber deaths from cancer (see chart). At a predicted 10 million global deaths a year, the scale of the issue will utterly dwarf the impact of our current world pandemic.

Progress

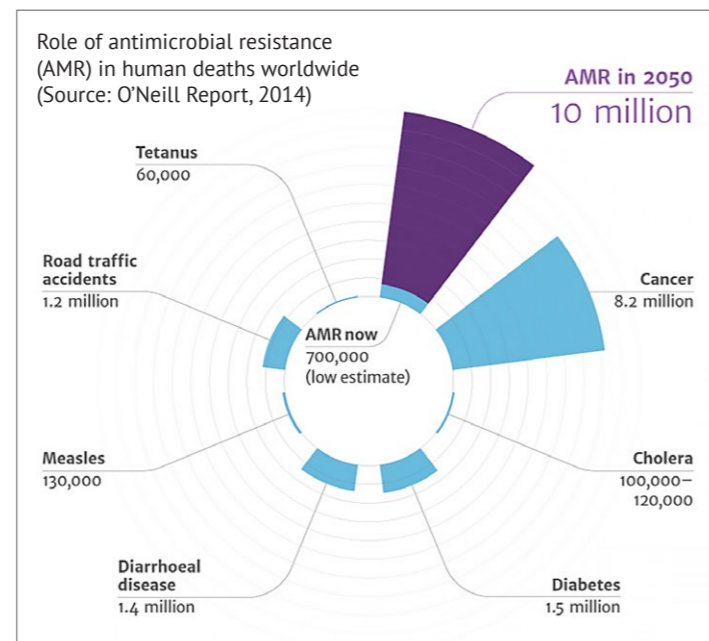
Many sheep farmers have already grasped the importance of this issue and taken positive steps to preserve the usefulness of antibiotics within their own flocks. So there has been a 34% reduction in sales of oral antibiotic for lambs since 2016. And, nationally, we have made huge and significant progress in reducing levels of antibiotics used across all farm animals – with a 45% reduction during a five-year period. It must be said, however, this progress has been largely evidenced in the more tightly integrated sectors, such as pigs and poultry, which are predominantly serviced by species-specific vets and where good farm data is available. We have sketchy flock-specific data from the sheep industry and we know there is a wide range across different flocks. Not one of us can afford to be complacent.

There are 5,500 farm vets in the UK, each with a unique and complicated job. Your vet may also work with dairy herds, suckler cows and calves, or

with pigs. Any one of their clients may also have a game-bird shoot or rear turkeys for Christmas or sell free-range eggs at the gate.

Farm Vet Champions (FVC) is a major collaborative project, led by RCVS Knowledge (the charity partner to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) and funded by the Veterinary Medicine Directive (VMD). All the British Veterinary Association farm species specialist divisions are involved, as well as all the major government and commercial veterinary and agricultural organisations. Fiona Lovatt is the clinical lead for the project.

FVC is directed at all farm vets and at its heart is the mantra 'plan prevent protect'. It is not about withholding necessary treatment, or even simply about considering the most appropriate treatment. We are taking a much



more holistic approach and building a supportive community of farm vets who are well equipped and well informed. This means they're empowered to work carefully with their clients to ensure livestock remains fit and healthy, and the need to turn to antibiotics is minimised.

Training

Phase one of the project, which was launched in May this year, provides more than 20 hours of high-quality species-specific technical veterinary training, as well as modules on vet-farmer communication and behaviour-change principles. This includes important sessions run by veterinary colleagues at the VMD and NOAH, on the legalities and practicalities of how veterinary medicines should be used.

Phase two will allow vets to network and share best-practice ideas, as well as set SMART goals. These will be specific goals, which are appropriate to their clients, farms and practice circumstances. They will have the ability to track and monitor their progress and modify goals when things don't go to plan.

We are not underestimating the challenges faced by both vets and farmers. You may feel that every prescribing decision your vet makes for your flock is small or insignificant. But put all 5,500 farm vets together, and recognise they alone are the guardians of farm antibiotic use in the UK, and you realise that every single one has their part to play. Every farm vet has a moral duty to be well informed and equipped to give you the best advice possible, and to ensure the future health of our children's and grandchildren's families and flocks.

Please ask your vet if they have signed up to the project and, if not, direct them to www.rcvsknowledge.org/farmvetchampions to find out more.

Flock Health's Philippa Page.



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TECHNICAL

Trials assess locally-grown sustainable soya-protein substitutes

With soya sustainability a growing concern among consumers, retailers and the wider agricultural industry, efforts are being made to explore protein substitutes in livestock diets.

On-farm trials, like those currently underway with Scotland's Monitor Farm Legacy Project, have been exploring the effects high-performing substitutes, such as treated rapemeal, have on ewes prior to, and during, lambing.

Kate Rowell, QMS Chairman and a previous QMS Monitor Farmer, say it is important to be open to change when looking to improve the sustainability, profitability and productivity of flocks.

"As QMS Monitor Farmers discovered, making high quality silage and feeding it with soya in the final three weeks of gestation saved time, labour and, most importantly, money, while still fulfilling the DUP and energy demands of late pregnancy.

"But soya is no longer the protein of choice from a sustainability point of view, so we're looking to trial something new and hoping a more local option of treated rapemeal, a co-product of cold pressed rapeseed oil, will be a good replacement."

Digestibility

Treating rapemeal – either with a heat or chemical process to increase the bypass protein content – lowers its digestibility in the rumen and increases the proportion that passes through the

rumen intact for digestion in the small intestine.

The trial involved 120 twin-bearing ewes split into two groups, with one batch fed the soya diet and the other group fed the treated-rapemeal diet. Both rations had the same nutrient value and the results will be analysed on birth rates, birth weight, growth rates and colostrum.

Positive

Although the formal analysis is yet to be finalised, early results have been positive.

Ms Rowell says: "Ewes receiving the treated-rapemeal ration in the run up to lambing have performed well, with lamb weights, colostrum quality and milk production all similar in comparison to those on soya, and no problems with either ration palatability or intake.

"It's a great result and means next year we can move the whole flock onto locally-produced, more sustainable option of treated rapemeal."

Funded by the Scottish Government and jointly managed by QMS and AHDB, the Monitor Farm Legacy Project will deliver a series of virtual and in-person events, featuring results and information from each of the Monitor Farms.

These will give the host farmer and their local community group an opportunity to review and reflect on the positive business changes and on-going projects that have continued beyond their participation in the Monitor Farm Programme.

An event focussing on this trial's results will be held in July, with information posted on the Monitor Farm website: www.monitorfarms.co.uk/introducing-the-legacy-monitor-farmers/.



Ewes fed treated rapemeal in the run up to lambing performed well.



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Sheep handling units – a design guide

Few sheep units are blessed with much manpower, so a good sheep handling unit – one that can reduce the time per 100 ewes by as much as 16 working days a year – will prove invaluable.

A well-designed handling unit will also make handling sheep easier and safer for staff. And maximising sheep welfare is also about taking early and preventative action, which will again be made easier if a good handling system is in place.



Ensure unsupervised dipping facilities are securely covered.

Handling – and a good system – should, first and foremost, work with sheep's behaviour. What sheep can and cannot see in a handling unit is critical to encouraging them to move forward. Their desire to flock together and follow each other can also be used to ease their flow through the unit.

Location of the handling unit is also important, to encourage its use. It must be convenient for handlers and easy for the flock to walk to. Access to water and electricity is also vital. The two ideal locations for a handling unit is in the yard next to the sheep shed or in the centre of the flock's grazing area. Locating it beside the sheep shed makes it easier to scan, footbath, vaccinate and condition score the flock. This location also allows nearby sheds and yards to act as collecting pens. If it's situated in the main grazing area it minimises the distance sheep have to walk.

Collection pen

Moving to the system itself, and starting with the collect pen, this must be large enough to hold regularly collected groups. An upland ewe without lambs needs 0.5m² per ewe and a lowland ewe with lambs needs 0.65m² per ewe. Neighbouring paddocks, sheds or roadways can be used as a collecting pens for bigger groups.

The collecting pen should be long, narrow and rectangular, ideally 3m-4.6m wide. This makes it easier for one person to push sheep forward. Pens

should also be interconnected with gates to allow different batches of sheep to be recirculated within the unit.

The forcing pen should be designed to create a steady flow of sheep into the race. Sheep tend to stall where there are sharp turns, so it's best to avoid 90-degree turns from the collecting pens into the forcing pen. Ideally the forcing pen will be in-line with the collecting pen. There are three popular forcing pens designs – the funnel, the circular or semi-circular – which will all work if correctly set out.

Drafting

The drafting race is key to many jobs carried out in the handling unit and it can be set up for two, three or four-way sorting. The ideal location for the drafting race is towards the centre of the handling unit or slightly off centre. This allows drafting to both the left and right.

A common mistake is to locate the drafting race against a building wall. This limits handling to one side and it also limits drafting to one side or to the end of the race. The race should also be at least 6.1m in length. Having a longer race like this reduces the time spent refilling the race and it gives the handler more time to assess the sheep coming through it.

A straight-sided drafting race, where the handler is working from outside the race, should be 450-500mm wide. When handling sheep from outside the race, the race sides should be 850mm

Collecting pens should be 3m-4.6m wide.

high – any taller and it's hard for the handler to reach sheep when their heads are down.

The race should also have a concrete floor and this should extend at least 600mm beyond the sides of the race, to give the handler a firm and level surface to walk on.

To prevent sheep stalling as they enter the race, the sorting gates should be at least 5m from the race entrance. Where there are gates along the race side, they should be 1.2m long for easy exit and should be solid – no gaps – to reduce stalling. The sorting gates at the end of a race should, however, be see-through to draw sheep forward.

It's not just about the sheep either. Handler welfare and comfort should also be considered when designing the drafting gate handles. For a full-hand grip, handles should be at least 120mm long. To avoid catching the operators fingers, locate handles 150mm back from the front of the gate. For handler comfort, handles should be elbow height and cover them with plastic piping to avoid handling metal during cold weather and to reduce vibrations.

Footbaths

The focus of lameness control is increasingly on prevention and this requires a well-designed footbath. To encourage regular use, footbaths must be easy to use, permanent and close to a tap for easier filling and cleaning.

The size of the footbath should be based on intervals of 250 litres, as most treatment products come in 25kg bags. The minimum solution starting depth should be 5cm, but some handlers prefer a starting depth of 7.5cm. The ideal footbath shape is a long rectangle, 1.5-3m wide.

Always locate the footbath to prevent pollution and the after-treatment standing area should hold at least four times the number of sheep as the footbath. A concrete floor is ideal.

Moving to dipping, dip tubs must be located and built to relevant regulatory requirements. The two most common dip tub entry options are by the side entry from the race, with a slide, or by lifting sheep into the tub.

For safety reasons all unsupervised dip tub must be covered with a locked child-proof cover.



Installing a dosing line above the gate increases handling safety and efficiency.



A pulley-operated swing gate.

Galvanised steel covers work best because they are less slippery when wet compared to timber. They also fit better and last longer than wood.

When it comes to the dip draining pens, their design should prevent pollution and pulley-operated gates can be used to keep handlers away from recently dipped sheep.

Gates

Having plenty of handler gates throughout the handling unit is an important safety feature. Locate them along the path the handler will take through the unit. They will eliminate climbing and lifting over penning. Handler gates should be 500-550mm wide.

And a dosing line 1.85m above floor level, along the length of the race, is also a good idea because it frees the handler from carrying the product pack and gun. Not only does this make the job of dosing quicker and easier, but also safer because it prevents spillages onto the handler.

The use of pulleys and counterweights also reduces the amount of walking and lifting the handler has to do when opening gates. But it's important counterweights are encased so they don't come into contact with the handler or sheep.

Teagasc is the agriculture and food development authority in the Republic of Ireland. This article is the result of Teagasc's work on sheep handling units, which is linked to a technical guide on the topic. Download the guide for free at <http://bit.ly/DesigningSheepHandlingUnits>.

Survey highlights need for enzootic abortion testing and vaccination

Enzootic abortion (EAE), the most common cause of abortion in UK ewes, costs the UK sheep industry up to £20 million annually.

The Q1 2020 APHA/SRUC Small Animal Ruminant Quarterly Report for disease surveillance and emerging threats revealed 42% – 177 of 420 cases – of all diagnosed abortion cases during this period were attributed to EAE.

The National Enzootic Abortion of Ewes survey, commissioned by Ceva Animal Health and supported by NSA, has highlighted the need for testing and vaccinating for EAE to help prevent unnecessary lamb losses. The survey generated responses from 322 farmers, with 83% of respondents owning a flock of more than 100 ewes, and provided valuable insights into farmers' experiences of EAE and disease patterns in their flocks, to help improve the approach to managing the condition.

Investigation

The survey revealed more than 75% of respondents experienced abortions in their ewes during both the 2018/19 and 2019/20 lambing seasons. Of those in the latter group, a quarter said the problem occurred in more than 2% of their flock.

Veterinary investigation is recommended if 2% or more of a total flock has aborted, or if two or more ewes have aborted during a two or three-day period – irrespective of flock size. But the survey revealed 44% of farmers whose flocks experienced abortions during the

2019/2020 lambing season did not ask their vet to investigate the cause.

Ewes with EAE will typically appear healthy but a rusty coloured discharge from the vulva will be seen and the aborted placenta looks bright red.

"Farmers who don't investigate why their ewes are aborting may well experience an abortion storm during the following year's lambing season," says Ceva's Katherine Timms, who analysed the results of the survey. "The bacteria that causes EAE, *Chlamydia abortus*, has the ability to lay latent in ewes until the next pregnancy.



Good biosecurity and vaccination can help prevent EAE.

"This means one infected sheep that aborts during the lambing season will shed infected material for a number of weeks. She has the potential to infect multiple ewes that will almost certainly abort at their next lambing.

"The consequences can be financially and reproductively devastating for farmers and they should speak to their vet about testing for EAE. Submitting samples during lambing is advisable,

but not always feasible. So we are offering farmers subsidised blood testing, which means aborted ewes can be tested from three weeks to three months after lambing."

RUMA set a target for farmers to increase the use of EAE vaccines by 5% per year across five years, to ensure the responsible use of antibiotics. But almost 50% of farmers surveyed did not vaccinate for EAE in the run up to 2019/20 lambing. That said, 57% of those not vaccinating said they would consider it.

Replacements

"Biosecurity is also key to preventing EAE," says Ms Timms. "The survey showed 59% of farmers said their flocks were closed, but it's important to check this is actually the case, with considerations including neighbouring farmers grazing their flocks on adjoining land."

"Biosecurity is also an issue when buying in replacement ewes. Half of those questioned said they buy in replacements, but 63% did not keep these separate from their flock until after they had lambed – putting the whole flock at risk of infection.

"EAE is definitely a disease where a sensible vaccination programme makes

huge sense. It is not expensive, so for any flock that buys ewes in or has sheep farming neighbours, it quickly pays for itself. Vaccination of females not in lamb can be done from five months of age until four weeks pre-tupping."

Speak to your vet about subsidised blood testing for EAE, or visit www.enzooticabortion.co.uk.

Data brings sheep lameness into sharp focus

Data collected from 450 flocks, using a questionnaire sent out in autumn 2018 to sheep farmers across England, Scotland and Wales, has shone a light on best practice when it comes to treating and preventing lameness.

Flocks ranging in size from four to 5,000 ewes took part, with flocks in Scotland typically larger than those in England and Wales, with an average of 545 ewes in Scottish flocks, and 200 in English and 325 in Welsh flocks.

Results revealed an average of 1.4% of ewes and 0.6% of lambs were lame at any one time, across all flocks, and the range of lameness incidence varied considerably. Figures show 38% of flocks had less than 2% ewes lame, 40% had a ewe lameness rate of 2%-5%, 22% had more than 5% lame ewes at any one time. This shows a similar pattern across all three countries, according to MSD Animal Health, which carried out the survey. Around 75% of farmers reported seeing scald and footrot in their flock and 37% reported seeing contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD).

Bacteria

As expected, flocks on peat soils had lower levels of lameness in ewes and lambs compared to those managed on other soil types – probably because the acidic soil kills the footrot bacteria and because sheep on peat also tend to be managed at a low stocking density, which reduces spread of footrot and CODD.

About 52% of respondents said they quarantined new sheep to the farm, and 20% of farmers quarantined returning sheep for more

than three weeks. The incidence of lameness was lower in these flocks compared to those where quarantine was not management policy.

About 37% of farmers did not foot trim routinely and only 14% of farmers never trimmed feet as part of treatment for footrot. Lameness incidence was lower in ewes and lambs in flocks where farmers did not trim feet routinely or as part of treatment for footrot. Data showed flocks where feet bled when they were trimmed had particularly high levels of lameness.

Approximately 52% of farmers treated ewes and lambs within three days of seeing them lame and lameness was lower in ewes and lambs in those flocks compared to those where treatment was delayed by more than three days.

Vaccination

Data on vaccination for footrot showed 9% of farmers have been using the vaccine for more than five years and lameness was lower in these flocks compared to unvaccinated flocks. In flocks vaccinated for fewer than five years there was no benefit of vaccination, highlighting vaccination is beneficial after several years of use.

About 44% of farmers used footbaths to treat scald and 27% to treat footrot, and these flocks had higher levels of lameness than flocks where footbaths were not used at all. The use of formalin in footbaths was linked to higher levels of lameness and underlines that treatment of individual lame sheep, to help recovery and prevent the spread of scald and footrot, is better management practice than treating the whole flock.

Flocks where replacement stock were selected from home-bred ewes that had never been lame had lower levels of lameness compared to flocks where lambs were selected from ewes that might have been lame or where replacements were purchased.



Prevent and tackle lameness

- Do not footbath – but do treat individual lame sheep within three days of becoming lame.
- Do not trim feet.
- Do treat ewes and lambs (and rams) within three days of seeing them lame with antibiotic injection and spray all four feet. Again, do not trim feet.
- Do quarantine bought-in sheep and sheep returning to the farm for more than three weeks, treating any cases of lameness.
- Do select replacements from ewes that have never been lame (if you purchase replacements ask your supplier to do this too).
- Do consider vaccination against footrot and if you want to invest in long-term reductions in lameness.
- Do consider ways to reduce the spread of footrot and CODD. These include: low stocking density, regular movement of sheep between fields, and separation of lame sheep at treatment until they are sound.

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See page 2 for contact details.

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Does money really grow on trees?

The policy framework and direction of travel around the net-zero agenda means financial support for tree planting is likely to increase.

NSA has long said tree planting should be integrated into farmland, rather than forestry replacing grazing livestock – but with financial incentives and potentially reduced workloads, will trees become more attractive than sheep?

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "Sheep farming and associated grassland is, typically, a highly sustainable approach to producing food and managing land. It delivers economically, environmentally and socially. NSA argues that, like for like, grassland and sheep farming is superior to woodland."

Where NSA has promoted trees, it is to integrate them into sheep systems as part of an agroforestry approach that is good for sheep, landscape, wildlife and hydrology. But NSA also accepts that agriculture is in an era of change and sheep farmers are investigating a host of options to provide them with a sustainable future.

For many, this will still include farming sheep at its core. But with Government tree-planting targets, the recently announced lump sum and exit scheme, and changing farm policies with local nature recovery and landscape recovery in mind, it is important to acknowledge that some NSA members will be at a point in their lives where woodland creation may be an option.

Mr Stocker continues: "Some members may believe it is not the place of NSA to provide this information, but I am confident some will find it of interest. Even if that isn't the case, it's good for all of us to know more about what's going on and the different land management options being explored."

Options

Tree planting is not suitable for all farmers or farms. It depends on their specific ideals, interests and preferences, as well as the type and topography of their land. But for those interested in woodland creation, Rafi Cohen of Forest Creation Partners (FCP) says there are several options to explore.

- **Farmer-run ventures.** For individuals who want to be in control and manage the process of creating woodland, this takes time and effort but can be financially rewarding. Mr Cohen says: "Tree-planting can be profitable if the right species are planted in the correct places. FCP has developed a data tool to help and support landowners and farmers to make sure they do this to maximise the return on their investment."
- **Leasing land.** Various businesses and organisations are offering to pay rent to farmers and landowners to take charge of woodland creation on their behalf. One example of this is England is Forestry England's Woodland Partnership. Mr Cohen

says: "This helps provide an income from a diversification without farmers having to develop new expertise on, or invest time and money into, an unfamiliar venture."

- **Selling land.** For those considering retirement, organisations engaged in responsible woodland creation may prove attractive.

More from Forest Creation Partners by contacting info@forestcreationpartners.com.

England, Wales and Scotland tree planting targets

- England. 30,000ha by 2025.
- Wales. 100,000ha by 2030.
- Scotland. 12,000ha a year, rising to 18,000ha a year by 2025.

Lump Sum Exit Scheme proposals

- Payments based at 2.35 times average annual BPS claimed between 2018 and 2020.
- Requirement to sell or rent out land and surrender entitlements.
- Payment cap of £100,000.
- Consultation runs until Wednesday 11th August.

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Following the flock

Our regular on-farm catch up with NSA officeholders takes us to Suffolk, Cumbria and Powys.

Dan Phipps

NSA Chairman and NSA Eastern Region, Suffolk



I thought life would slow down a bit when the pandemic hit.

It may well have done, but it certainly doesn't feel that way now. By mid-May, shearing was behind us and lambs from our early-lambing flock were selling at a price we could only dream of a year ago. There are undoubtedly many factors at play here, not least the firm price in 2020 that kept lambs coming forward. The fact we still have an export market post Brexit and the increase in sales during the pandemic have led to a healthy start to our lamb sales in 2021.

Traditionally, the final few of the old-season lambs and the first of the new season lambs would realise higher prices, though not always high enough to justify the extra inputs.

Lambing early for us is as much about management and how we fit in around the horse stud business. Lambing early means we have our highest number of livestock to coincide with the spring flush of grass, and numbers are then lower by the time we would otherwise be competing for grass with horses in the drier summer months.

I cannot tell you how satisfying it is to see the quality lambs we produce, and the team's hard work is justified by the returns we're currently seeing. May this continue for a long time and our resilience, as an industry, be rewarded.



Quality lambs are commanding a good price, says Dan.

Grass is growing and sheep are happy, reports Kate.



Eddie's ewes maintained good body condition after lambing.

Edward Eastham

NSA UK Policy & Technical Chairman, Cumbria



Record sale values of over-wintered hill bred lambs has been a pleasing feature of spring 2021.

However, this must be tempered by the ever rising cost of farm inputs. The quest for reducing these inputs and gaining efficiencies is an ongoing feature of any farm business. It does sometimes feel that our efforts to streamline production is, ultimately, for the benefit of others – such as large-scale processors and retailers.

Time and thought has recently been given to Defra stakeholder group meetings, regarding the development of the Sustainable Farming Incentive pilots. As well as providing for nature, it is crucial that future schemes within ELMS are structured in a way that allows the continuation of established sheep farming systems in our many and varied situations. As ever, it is the details that count. Scheme prescriptions must allow local knowledge and conditions to determine future stocking levels, rather than national blanket applications.

The weather, as always, impacts on our sheep farming operations. A long, wet winter left ewes looking rather 'clashed', as we say in Cumbria. They did, however, maintain body condition and lamb with plenty of milk. A record cold, frosty April and early May, then meant a lack of grass became a major concern. This tested the practicalities of our paddock grazing system, with more frequent moves than originally intended.

As we move on from spring, the focus will be on prime lamb values, particularly as greater numbers become available. A sound lamb trade throughout summer will maintain industry confidence and underpin breeding sheep sales in the autumn.

Kate Hovers

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chairman, Powys



Following a dry spell, we are back to wellies and glorious mud in the Brecon Beacons.

The grass is growing, though, and sheep are happy. We lambed some crossbred ewes early this year, which turned out to be a good move when we sold the four-year-old ewes and lambs at a flying trade locally.

The main flock lambed in April in mainly OK weather and mostly in a short space of time, although there were a few 'stragglers' lambing every other day for the final week or so. We lamb inside to save grass for freshly-lambed ewes and it's always good to see the shed empty again. We just need to clean it out now and we'll be ready to start again.

We heard the cuckoo in its usual place in the final days of April – two weeks earlier than 2020 – and a few minutes later our neighbour was on the phone to say she had heard it. The first cuckoo is always a bit of a competition in farmer chat at our local market.

The early lambs had a nematodirus drench in early May and I am monitoring the oldest bunch of April lambs to see if they need the same. We are missing catching up with old and new friends at shows again this year, but I don't miss the preparation. Those who know me realise I forget to brush my own hair, so brushing sheep for hours seems bizarre!



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