

# SHEEP FARMER

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2021

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



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DELIVERY IS FREE TO AN AREA NEAR YOU

# Time to stand up and show we're part of the solution

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER  
AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2021  
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The name may give the game away – National Sheep Association's core interest is sheep farming.

But sheep farming doesn't operate in isolation and, due to its multifunctionality and the complexity of farming and food, we rightly get drawn into a whole host of related topics way beyond the remit of managing sheep. These include rural and social issues, local economies, global trade deals, health and nutrition, land management, tree-planting targets, natural versus man-made fibres and textiles, carbon offsetting, climate change, and nature. There are few discussion topics in our house that fail to lead back to sheep farming (sometimes possibly with a questionable connection, but it usually raises a smile!)

The most recent topic was the Henry Dimbleby-led National Food Strategy, released in July. The future of sheep farming, and all farming, will be heavily influenced by three policy headliners: the Agriculture Bill, the Environment Bill and the Food Strategy, which is likely to see some related legislation in due course. Collectively these will also set the framework for climate and nature recovery targets (two major influencers of the future). It's all English legislation, but it will influence similar work underway in the devolved nations.

## Framework

The Agriculture Bill and the Food Strategy should, in theory, set the framework for food production and food security. But these will be less specific in setting targets compared to the climate and nature legislation, because food is considered to be a tradeable product driven by market forces.

The Agriculture Bill has completed its required passage and has full royal assent. The Environment Bill has been through its third reading and is now passing through the House of Lords. It is at an advanced stage and the Government is likely to release a White Paper as a result of the Food Strategy before the end of the year.

So while we can expect a constant flow of Government consultations during the coming months, we can also expect a heightened focus on

food policy and legislation before we sit down to feast on our Christmas dinner.

There will be risks and probably none more-so than pressure on meat consumption for reasons of health and climate. But if the Government follows the recommendations set out in the National Food Strategy (not something we can rely on), I hope there is more cause for optimism than pessimism.

NSA's initial response to the food strategy made the case that while we accept that our food system needs to change, this doesn't mean everything is wrong. In fact the report shows there is much that is good, and some great beacons of hope. We should be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

## Challenges

Sheep farming can't be immune from the climate, nature and diet challenges ahead. Better to stand up and own these challenges, provide evidence we can be part of the solution, and show we are keen to do more if we have the means.

We have a great base to build from. British lamb and mutton is produced mainly from grass and is mostly consumed as an unadulterated food, eaten as part of a healthy balanced diet. It is not associated with junk or highly processed foods and average consumption rates for lamb show, on average, it is consumed at well below recommended meat intake levels. British lamb and mutton have high levels of beneficial acids, oils and micronutrients, and most of our grassland grows with the aid of little more than sunshine and rain.

Along the way, soil is sequestering carbon and our grasslands provide a home and food sources for nature. You could hardly imagine anything more sustainable or renewable. But in measuring sustainability the food strategy highlights an incredible gap – carbon footprinting only takes account of the footprint made while in Britain, so imported ingredients aren't counted.

This, coupled with the misrepresentation of methane through conversion to carbon equivalents, means there couldn't be a more misleading way to measure the footprint of our food. No wonder consumers are confused, or policymakers make highly questionable decisions.

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## NSA regions

### Central



Chairman: **James Bickerton**



Secretary: **Rose Smyth**  
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### Cymru / Wales



Chairman: **Kate Hovers**



Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**  
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### Eastern



Chairman: **Dan Phipps**



Manager: **Jonathan Barber**  
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### Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**



Secretary: **Katie James**  
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### Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**



Manager: **Heather Stoney-Grayshon**  
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### Northern Ireland



Chairman: **Jonny Farmer**



Development Officer: **Edward Adamson**  
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### Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**



Regional Coordinator: **Grace Reid**  
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### South East



Chairman: **Yan Le Du**



Secretary: **Sarah Blake**  
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### South West



Chairman: **Howard Tratt**



Secretary: **Ian May**  
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### NSA Rams Sales



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

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NSA Next Generation Ambassadors will be lending their support to this year's Love Lamb Week campaign.



## Love Lamb Week 2021 – get involved!

Love Lamb Week returns from Wednesday 1st to Tuesday 7th September this year, providing opportunities for farmers, butchers, farm shops and others along the food chain to get involved in the campaign, and to promote all that is good about the sheep sector.

Once again the campaign will highlight the sustainable nature of lamb production, alongside its delicious taste and positive nutritional benefits. And with comparisons currently being made between UK and overseas farming standards, it's never been more important to promote the high welfare standards all UK sheep farmers are proud to work to.

NSA encourages all members to get involved during the week-long campaign, whether working with the local community to arrange events, perhaps organising special tasting sessions, or simply increasing social media activity and sharing positive messages about sheep production online – using the hashtag #LoveLambWeek. For more ideas on activities visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lovelamb](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lovelamb), or to request a farm shop or butchers promotional kit email [butcherskit@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:butcherskit@ahdb.org.uk).

## NSA prize-draw winner

Tracey Cobbledick, from Bude in Cornwall, is this year's second lucky winner of a lamb warming box and lambing pens, courtesy of Solway Recycling.

Tracey, who runs 120 commercial and 35 pedigree Beltex ewes on 120 acres (48ha), was entered into the draw having recommended a friend to join NSA earlier this year. She says: "It was a nice surprise to hear I'd won. I have to wait before I can use my prize, but I'll look forward to lambing time even more with this equipment to help."

Tracey may be a familiar face to NSA South West Region members, as she is a regular vendor at the NSA South West Ram Sale, which takes place in August at Exeter Livestock Market. She also likes showing and has enjoyed great success in both summer and winter carcase competitions.

There are two further chances for NSA members to win in this year's membership draw. New members are entered on joining the association, while existing members can enter through recommending friends or family to sign up for NSA membership. *More details at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership).*



## Quiz a policeman

A leading rural crime officer has agreed to do a Q&A in the next edition of this magazine – so let us know if you have any burning questions, particularly around sheep worrying by dogs. Email [enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk) or follow NSA on Facebook and Twitter.

## Stop press

Depending on when this magazine arrives with you, there may still be time to attend the NSA AGM on Thursday 12th August (online or in Worcestershire), the NSA Cymru/Wales Region Next Generation Day on Sunday 15th August (in Powys) or the NSA South West Ram Sale on Wednesday 18th August (at Exeter Market). Details at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).



## Lucky new members win JFC footbath

Having signed up to join NSA during a special month-long campaign, new members William Crew, from Dumfries and Galloway, and Daniel Creighton, from Warwickshire, were recently announced as the lucky recipients of a foam footbath and hoof solution, kindly supplied by JFC Agri. Congratulations to them both – and welcome to all new members.

## Support NSA with Amazon Smile

NSA has now signed up as a recognised charity on Amazon, meaning the Amazon Smile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the amount you spend on Amazon to NSA.

To make sure NSA benefits when you spend on Amazon, visit [smile.amazon.co.uk](http://smile.amazon.co.uk) and either create an Amazon account or log into your existing Amazon account. Search for 'National Sheep Association' in the charity search function (not NSA) and enjoy some 'socially responsible shopping'.

## Book now to join online sheep conferences

Two free online conferences are set to run this autumn – NSA South East Region's Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) conference and the virtual version of the Sheep Breeders Round Table (SBRT). SHWAP will be three excellent evening sessions from Tuesday 26th to Thursday 28th October, while SBRT is six webinars over five days from Monday 15th November, the final one of which is hosted by NSA.

Both are free to attend and the breadth of topics and speakers demonstrates that, while face-to-face events are more sociable, virtual ones bring a greater expertise into one space than is often possible in 'real life'. Find out more at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbirt](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbirt) and [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SHWAP](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SHWAP).

# NSA regional network is beating heart of the organisation

With Covid-19 limiting the usual activities of NSA regions, denying the sheep sector of the vital professional and social network of regional meetings, farm walks and other activities has been frustrating.

But as restrictions begin to ease, NSA regional committees are fighting fit and keen to welcome back members to get involved in the network in whatever way they wish – either by attending regional events or becoming an officeholder or volunteer.

Dan Phipps, NSA Chairman, says: "One of the things that drew me to NSA in the first place is that everyone's views are valued, from a self-employed shepherd, as I was then, to an owner-operator, a hobbyist with a few pedigree animals, or a hill farmer with thousands of sheep. Intensive, extensive, part-time or new entrant, there is something for us all.

"You can also be involved to whatever extent you want to be. I know some members are content to pay their subscription and know it is contributing to NSA providing a voice for the sheep sector. Others enjoy being a steward at a regional sheep event or Next Generation day, but can't think of anything worse than attending a committee meeting. While some enjoy discussing pertinent topics at committee level, even going on to be a regional chairman or a representative further on in the network. Some are even as foolhardy as myself and choose to operate at a national level.

"The organisation could not function without its volunteers. I extend my thanks to them all, and encourage more members to get involved where they want to, knowing there is a comfort level for everyone."

*Read on for a reminder of the NSA regional structure, or turn over for more about NSA's post-Covid-19 plans around the UK.*

## Regional committees

One role of NSA regional committees is to discuss sheep farming topics to help formulate NSA policy positions on key matters.

This may be areas of concern that NSA staff and officeholders involved in policy work have asked regions to debate, because it is on the agenda for politicians and government policymakers. Or it could be a subject that a grassroots member has raised, wishing it to be compared to the situation in other regions and escalated within NSA's structure.

Another role is to organise events and activities for members in the region, from small evening meetings right through to the flagship NSA sheep events, which the organisation is renowned for. Funds raised at the large sheep events, which are held biennially, are retained within a region to finance other activities and contribute to UK-wide initiatives, including the NSA Next Generation programme. *To engage with your region, as a one-off or to get involved, approach an officeholder or go via NSA Head Office. See page 2 for contact details.*



**Eddie Eastham**  
NSA UK Policy & Committee Chairman

"NSA is among the minority of farming organisations in representing the whole of the UK. The regional structure is a vital part of bringing together distinct voices from all four UK nations."



**Grace Reid**  
NSA Scottish Region Coordinator

"For the devolved UK nations, it is fundamental we have our own, independent committees, while being collectively integral to NSA, to ensure diverse policies and unique positions are catered for."



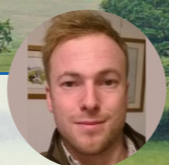
**David Howlett**  
NSA Central Region Committee Member

"I have no doubt grassroots members can put forward any views they have, or be sure likeminded individuals are raising similar concerns."



**Kevin Harrison**  
NSA English Committee Chairman

"The diversity of sheep enterprises, opinions and personalities within NSA is fantastic, and ensures every aspect of the industry is well represented."



**Howard Tratt**  
NSA South West Chairman

"The beauty of the NSA Next Generation initiative being built on the organisation's regional network is there's a way for younger members to get involved at whatever level they choose."

## NSA structure

NSA's direction and operation is governed by a Management Board of Trustees. While each Trustee is responsible for NSA as a whole, they are nominated by their region, ensuring the board is fully representative.

The board is supported by two additional committees, which again have representatives from throughout the regional structure. Currently these committees are the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee and the NSA Finance & General Purpose Committee, although the latter is due to be replaced with a Finance Scrutiny Committee in 2022.

The devolved nations have positions on these committees, whereas the English regions elect three reps for an overarching English Committee. In turn the English Committee elects reps for the policy and finance committees. Currently these are Kevin Harrison and Antony Spencer for policy, and Mike Credland and Yan Le Du for finance. *All officeholders are detailed at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about).*

## Ram sales and event organisers

Complementing NSA's regional network is a series of ram sales, with even more volunteers supporting these much-valued events.

The NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale Committee, which oversees sales in August and September, is currently chaired by Graham Jones, with Jane Smith in the position of Executive Director. NSA Eastern Region committee runs sales at Rugby Market and Melton Mowbray, and there is a separate ram sale committee in NSA South West Region to arrange the Exeter sale. Robert Jordon is Chairman, with Sue Martyn as Secretary. Sue also organises NSA Sheep South West, while up in Scotland the committee is reinforced by Euan Emslie in charge of commercial activities, including NSA Scot Sheep and NSA Highland Sheep. *More about the ram sales on pages 10-11.*

## Breed societies

There are 83 sheep breed societies affiliated to NSA.

In addition to attending the annual NSA Breed Society Forum, these societies are encouraged to integrate into NSA's structure by nominating reps to sit on regional committees. These reps hold voting rights so can influence regional decisions in the same way as an individual member. *Breed societies should contact NSA Head Office to check or amend their regional reps.*

## Familiar faces in your region

Central



**James Bickerton**  
Chairman



**Rose Smyth**  
Secretary



**Charles Sercombe**  
Trustee



**Matthew Haydon**  
Officeholder



**David Howlett**  
Officeholder



**Alistair Sneddon**  
Officeholder

Eastern



**Dan Phipps**  
Chairman & Officeholder



**Jonathan Barber**  
Manager



**Andrew Foulds**  
Trustee & Officeholder



**Robert Spink**  
Officeholder

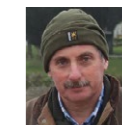
Marches



**Antony Spencer**  
Chairman & Officeholder



**Katie James**  
Secretary



**Henry Dunn**  
Trustee



**Mike Credland**  
Officeholder



**Richard Vines**  
Officeholder

Northern



**Thomas Carrick**  
Chairman & Officeholder



**Heather Stoney-Grayshon**  
Manager



**John Geldard**  
Trustee



**Greg Dalton**  
Officeholder



**Viv Lewis**  
Officeholder

Northern Ireland



**Jonny Farmer**  
Chairman & Trustee



**Edward Adamson**  
Development Officer



**Campbell Tweed**  
Policy & Tech Rep



**Brian Jamieson**  
Finance Rep

Scotland



**Jen Craig**  
Chairman & Policy & Tech Rep



**Grace Reid**  
Co-ordinator



**Aileen McFadzean**  
Trustee



**Peter Myles**  
Trustee

South East



**Yann Le Du**  
Chairman, Trustee & Officeholder



**Sarah Blake**  
Secretary



**Andrew Barr**  
Officeholder



**Matt Blythe**  
Officeholder

South West



**Howard Tratt**  
Chairman & Officeholder



**Ian May**  
Secretary



**Peter Delbridge**  
Trustee



**Peter Derryman**  
Officeholder



**Ollie Matthews**  
Officeholder

Cymru/Wales



**Kate Hovers**  
Chairman & Trustee



**Helen Roberts**  
Development Officer



**Lew Thomas**  
Trustee



**Tim Ward**  
Trustee



**John Lloyd**  
Policy & Tech Rep



**Margaret Dalton**  
Finance Rep

# NSA regional reports

## NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Secretary

Having made good use of Zoom to allow members to interact with some influential speakers during the past year (including Neil Parish, MP for Tiverton and Honiton and EFRA Committee Chairman; Nicholas Saphir, AHDB Chairman; and Andrew Hogley, British Wool Chief Executive) the region is now looking forward to some face-to-face activity.

During the coming months we aim to start holding in-person farm walks again across the region, including one where we hope to be holding the regional Next Generation Shepherd competition. Please keep an eye on the Weekly Email Update for exact dates and locations. We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible. But, in the meantime, please feel free to contact me for more information. [Contact details for all regional officeholders on page 2.](#)

## NSA Northern Region

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

**Calling all young shepherd who reside in Northern England! NSA Northern Region has been busy planning its regional heat for the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition.**

Having gratefully received generous sponsorship from Carrs Billington, the region will hold the competition and training day on Sunday 29th August at Laypool Farm, Renwick, Penrith, Cumbria, CA10 1JL. The event is being kindly hosted by Daniel and Jackie Taylforth.

Competitors will be required to compete in five out of six shepherding tasks, to include tests of skill such as ATV handling, lamb selection and dog handling. Classes will be held for 14 to 17 year olds, as well as 17 to 26 year olds. Cash prizes totalling £1,000 are available to win and take home on the day. Entries will close on Wednesday 18th August. [Get in touch using the contact details on page 2.](#)



NSA Central Region recently held a face-to-face meeting.

## NSA Central Region

By Rose Smyth, Secretary

**We had our first in-person committee meeting in June, held in a shed at my home.**

There was a great turn out with fantastic discussion and, importantly, lots of cake. Everyone was happy to meet in person once again and to have the chance to catch up properly. We were also lucky with the weather to hold an outdoor meeting.

The region has exciting plans underway for the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition, which is set to take place on Saturday 25th September by kind permission of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire at Chatsworth Estate. Thanks go to Regional Committee Member David Howlett and Vice Chairman Jack Charleton for helping to arrange this. We look forward to a great day.

By the time you read this, we will have had a farm walk, kindly hosted by the Buckley family at Dove Holes. It will be fantastic to have the first event in the region for such a long time to include a scenic tour of the beautiful Derbyshire hills.

The next committee meeting is on Thursday 2nd September, to be held at the Traveller's Rest in Brough and starting at 7.30pm. The more the merrier, so please come along and join us for a social evening.



Daniel Taylforth, wife Jackie and son Oliver – hosts of the NSA Northern Region Next Generation day in late August.



NSA Marches Region welcomed young sheep farmers to its Next Generation Shepherd competition and training day.

## NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Secretary

**NSA Marches Region welcomed back enthusiastic young sheep farmers to its NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition and training day, held at the beginning of June, for its first face-to-face event in more than 10 months.**

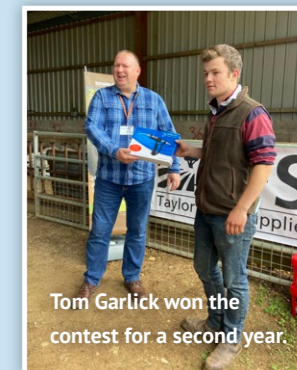
Kindly hosted by Overbury Estates, based near Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, the event saw more than 30 young farmers attend and take part in training sessions and demonstrations of shepherding skills, with many of the group also choosing to compete.

Retaining his title of NSA Marches Region Next Generation Shepherd was Tom Garlick, from Hereford, who once again impressed judges in competition elements such as shearing, animal health administration and ATV handling.

Taking second place was Jonathan Cross, from Hay on Wye in Herefordshire, and in third place and also receiving a prize for the best under-18 competitor was Ben Edwards, from Ledbury in Herefordshire.

Winners went away with cash prizes, as well as equipment including drenching guns, crooks and hand trimmers. All were kindly donated by sponsors Taylor Farm Supplies. Thanks to all who attended and NSA Marches Region committee members, who helped both before and during the event. Thanks also go to competition sponsors Meatline, Ace ATV, Lister Shearing, Outback Outfitters, and Farmers Fresh.

The region now looks forward to holding a farm walk in the near future. Members in the region are encouraged to look out for more news on this soon in the Weekly Email Update and on the NSA website.



Tom Garlick won the contest for a second year.

## NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

**NSA Northern Ireland Region marked the day in July when it should have held 2021's NSA Sheep NI event with a webinar, which can be viewed on the NSA website.**

Committee members visited the host farm online, by kind permission of Kate Kingan and Peter Mant, where they enjoyed a trip around the farm and heard from Peter, as well as CAFRE adviser Senan White, about the operation of the farm. Also from CAFRE, Eileen McCloskey offered a few tips on topical ewe and lamb management issues, and was followed by British Wool's Graham Clarke, who provided an overview of the organisation's work.

The event was rounded off with a Q & A session, chaired by local journalist David Wright. NSA Northern Ireland committee wishes to thank everyone who helped with, or were involved in the production of, this webinar. [Watch the webinar online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.](#)

## Missing an excellent day out at an NSA sheep event? Us too!

Mark the 2022 and 2023 dates in your diary now.

### 2022

**NSA Scot Sheep**  
Wednesday 1st June,  
Dundee

**NSA Sheep Event**  
Wednesday 27th July,  
Worcestershire

### 2023

**NSA Welsh Sheep**  
Tuesday 16th May, Powys

**NSA North Sheep**  
Wednesday 7th June, Northumberland

**NSA Sheep South West**  
Tuesday 20th June, Dorset

**NSA Sheep Northern Ireland**  
July TBC, Co. Armagh



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

## NSA Scottish Region

Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

The next NSA Scottish Region committee meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday 11th August, via Zoom.

It will incorporate topics such as activities of the region, communications and upcoming policy items. Members are reminded of the recent webinar hosted by NSA Scottish Region, call 'Lynx in Scotland – an evening discussion for Scottish sheep farmers and crofters to explore and express concerns'. A summary document of questions and answers, as well as a recording of the event, can be viewed on the NSA Scottish Region website under the news section. *Go online at [www.nsascotland.org](http://www.nsascotland.org).*



Jeff Gwillim and his family are hosting NSA Cymru's September farm walk.

## NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

By the time you receive this issue of Sheep Farmer, NSA Cymru will have hosted its Next Generation Shepherd competition at Orseddwen, Selattyn – my home farm.

A full report will be available in the next issue. Thanks to all who helped on the day and to the Texel Society for its continued support.

We also recently ran a successful photography competition, with Regional Chairman Kate Hovers acting as judge. Entires from Alex Alton and Elin Orrells were selected as winners with both receiving NSA membership subscription and a book of their choice about sheep farming.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region was one of several organisations to sponsor the virtual Royal Welsh Show, which had a busy four days of competitions and events. As an organisation, we are so looking forward to being back at the show next year and meeting up with members there.

The region is also looking forward to a farm walk on Tuesday 14th September at Cwm Farm, on behalf of NSA member Jeff Gwillim and family. Jeff is the fifth generation of his family to farm at Cwm Farm, adjoining the Black Mountains, south of Talgarth, near Brecon in mid-Wales. The farm runs 1,000 Welsh Mountain cross Cheviot ewes on a 300-acre all-grass hill farm with ground lying 600-1,200 foot above sea level and grazing rights on the Black Mountains running to 2,500ft. *More online at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events). Please confirm your attendance by contacting Helen Roberts.*

## NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

While enjoying temperatures of 30°C in our region, it seems strange to be thinking about our next regional event, the biennial Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Conference, due to take place in October. But the organising committee has been busy making plans.

Members are encouraged to add the dates for the virtual event to their diaries, with the evening online sessions taking place on 26th, 27th and 28th October 2021.

Headline speakers – including Fiona Lovatt, Tommy Boland and Peter Lord – will be leading sessions on health planning, grazing management, and how to attract and retain the next generation, as well as other interesting sessions.

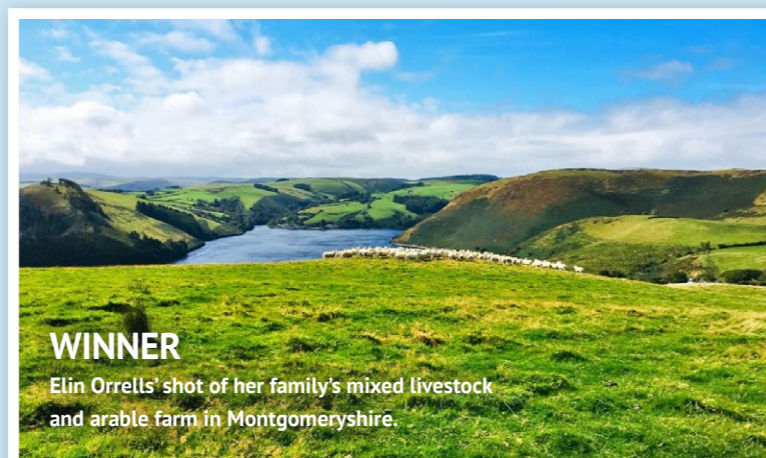
Additional speakers will include: Fiona Kenyan, from Moredun's Targeted Specific Treatment project; Ian Metson, an Essex-based farmer who is currently practicing grazing sheep in an arable rotation; Tom Goatman, British Grassland Society's Chief Executive; and Katie James, coordinator of the NSA Next Generation programme.

A full programme will be published in the October edition of NSA Sheep Farmer magazine. *Keep an eye on the Weekly Email Update and visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SHWAP](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SHWAP) for more details, including how to register.*



### WINNER

Alex Alton's photograph of his Badgerface ewe and lambs.



### WINNER

Elin Orrells' shot of her family's mixed livestock and arable farm in Montgomeryshire.

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11	2,750	3,300
10	2,600	3,100
9	2,450	2,900
8	2,300	2,700
7	2,150	2,500
6	2,000	2,300
5	1,850	2,100
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3	1,550	1,700
2	1,400	1,500
1	1,250	1,300

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# Strong commercial trade at NSA Wales & Borders Early Ram Sale

A strong trade with brisk bidding set the season off to a confident start at the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale in early August.

The sale, held at the Royal Welsh Showground, saw a top price of 1,600gns paid for a Charollais shearing ram. In addition, two Texels sold at 1,400gns and three Suffolks at 850gns.

Turnover totalled £142,970, with 211 rams sold, representing 73.5% of the number forward. Top prices and averages were up on the previous sale in 2019, across almost all the breeds.

## Quality

Buyers and vendors were pleased with the trade and with the quality of rams offered for sale. NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman Graham Jones said it made for a good start to the year and augured well for the Main Sale in September.

He added: "The trade followed the quality and the quality rams sold well. It was a very commercial sale and commercial buyers were prepared to pay for what they wanted."

The top price of 1,600gns was achieved by a Charollais shearing Foulrice ram, bred by Charles and Stephen Marwood. It was supreme champion at the pre-sale breed show and was sold to Elgan Roberts from Denbigh.

A Texel from the Williams family of Lockerbie sold for 1,400gns to Cain Owen, from Geirn near Carmel, Anglesey. Another Texel from the Watkins family also sold for 1,400gns to J. Gravell of Machen, Monmouthshire.

Charles Marwood said of his 1,600gn ram: "The shearing is an Osprey son and Osprey, one of our



Auctioneer James Amphlett holds the rosette for Charles Marwood and his 1,600gn Charollais ram.

main senior stock rams, came up as one of the top carcass rams on Ram Compare this year.

"That's what we aim for in the flock – to produce rams with good skins and tremendous shape."

Elgan Roberts of Llanefydd, Denbigh, was delighted with his purchase, praising his great back end, good carcass and amazing skin. The ram will be used on his small pedigree flock and also on commercial ewes.

## Returns

One of the two Texels that sold for 1,400gns was the breed reserve champion, from the Corras Flock and bred by the Watkins family of Abergavenny. They sold three rams in their first visit to the early sale and returns had been better than expected.

The other 1,400gn Texel was the breed champion, one of a consignment of 10 shearing rams brought from Lockerbie by Dona Williams and her father, Dewi. He said that while everyone had been a little anxious before the sale, it had proved to be better than expected and a really good start to the season.

Paul Curran and Ally Davis of Talgarth, Powys, sold two Wernfawr Suffolk shearlings for 850gns a head, while a Horton Suffolk ram bred by John Pryce made the same price. Helen Roberts, Mr Pryce's daughter, said the sale had been a lot better than many had expected given the ongoing Covid-19 challenges.

*The NSA Wales & Border Main Sale will take place at the Royal Welsh Showground on Monday 20th September 2021.*

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**NSA South West Ram Sale**

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**NSA Eastern Region Rugby Sale**

Friday 27th August – Rugby Farmers Mart  
*Catalogue available online now.*

**Melton Midlands Sheep Fair incorporating the NSA Eastern Region Melton Sale**

Friday 17th September – Melton Mowbray Market  
*Entries close Monday 16th August. Entry form and sale information available online.*

**NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale**

Monday 20th September – Builth Wells  
*Entries closed. Catalogue available online soon.*

**Sale information at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)**

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

*\* Inspections running as normal at Exeter, Rugby and Melton sales; Covid-19 restrictions limiting inspections at Wales & Border sale.*



# Positive start to the day with monthly NSA Breakfast Clubs



The most recent NSA Breakfast Club topics have generated a great deal of positivity about the future of the sheep sector – so don't miss out as this series of popular webinars continues on the first Wednesday of every month.

The early morning session looking at farm sustainability assessments took the theme of 'it's more than just carbon' to highlight that sheep farming contributes far more than negative greenhouse gas emissions. Despite criticism in the media that red meat production is a key contributor to climate change, the webinar looked at the good being done, every day, to protect nature, the environment and the climate, while providing healthy food for the nation and supporting rural communities.

To promote these public goods being delivered, evidence is needed as well as a means of measurement to support and enhance the reputation of the sheep industry, and help protect and grow market opportunities.

## Footprinting

The webinar contributors discussed the tools and methods available for this, meaning the audience was presented with a wealth of information on how carbon footprinting tools can be used, as a start point, to create a plan of how to measure sustainability on farm. Speakers highlighted that the climate change and sustainability issue does not begin and end with carbon, and other measures are also important.

Emphasis on key measures, including biodiversity, soil health, water quality and community impact, was also given. All should be identified, in addition to carbon, to build a complete picture of the actions required to ensure all farms are part of the climate, nature and public health solution.

Take-home messages included every farm can do something to try to reduce its environmental impact, but there will be different answers for different systems.

A completely different topic took centre stage in July, giving an insightful update on both domestic and international lamb trade since the UK left the EU six months ago. Attracting one of the largest ever audiences of all NSA Breakfast Clubs, the session encouraged discussion on what the future might hold and how the industry can rise to meet market needs.

Discussions began with the recognition of the impact of both Brexit and Covid-19 on current market trends, and how it is important to note it's

not easy to separate them in terms of significance. Attendees heard how trade had been negatively affected due to both factors but, more encouragingly, how exporters report more product could be sold if it were made available.

## Premium prices

Attention was also drawn to positive market trends, showing how domestic consumers have been prepared to pay premium prices and domestic consumption has stayed strong. The question now is how to maintain this.

Figures show the growth has been across supermarkets, butchers and other retailers – something the four UK levy bodies are aware of and have incorporated into successful consumer marketing campaigns and plans for the return of international trade events once Covid-19 restrictions allow.

The successful webinar concluded with a lively discussion about trade deals and negotiations, the role of direct-to-consumer sales within the domestic meat trade, carcass specifications for different consumer demands and the growing halal market.

Sign up for future NSA Breakfast Club webinars at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events) and view recording of previous ones at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars). NSA expresses its thanks to all speakers at the session so far.

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# Policy update

By Sean Riches, NSA

## NSA continues to press for involvement in future FTAs

While the Agreement In Principle has been signed between the respective UK and Australian governments, there is still a lot of work to do to complete the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) before it goes to Parliament for ratification.

There has been much written from all of the UK sectors involved in livestock farming, which can be summarised as having a feeling of being used as sacrificial lambs.

On the many forums where NSA has a seat, representations have been repeatedly made to take note of the concerns raised and to minimise the deleterious impact the FTA could have on British farming. We do fear opportunities are now limited to change the content of the Australia deal, but have continued to press for involvement with input for the other deals on the horizon, namely the New Zealand deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Canada, Mexico and India.

Some will have lesser or greater relevance to the sheep sector in terms of imports, but could offer opportunities for export of sheep meat and genetics. It would appear a US deal is now unlikely in 2021, as the Biden administration has de-prioritised bilateral international trade negotiations while it focuses on rebooting the USA's post-pandemic economy. That said, a working group has been established to continue discussions.

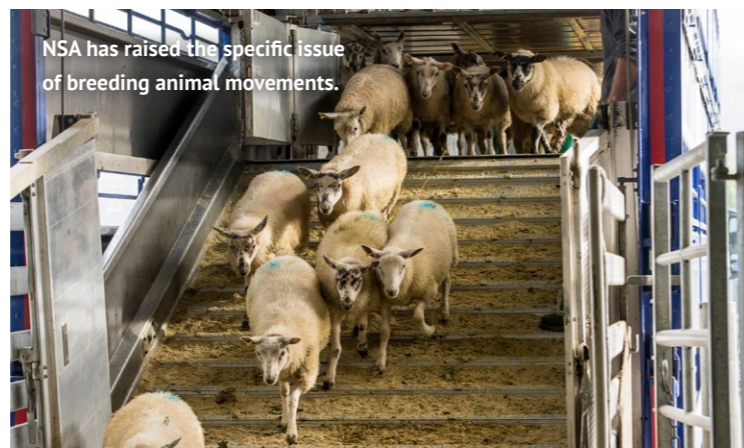
## Pathway to better health to boost flock performance

The core elements of the Sustainable Farming Incentive roll out for England, expected to be available in 2022, will also include the Annual Health and Welfare Review.

For many farmers, this will be a first step on the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, a scheme strand to achieve healthier, higher welfare animals performing to their very best.

The review, expected to take place early in 2022, will involve vets to help to understand the health and welfare of the national herd and flock, and enable future support to be targeted in the right way at both farm and national level. As part of the review, individual farmers and vets will be encouraged to share data and have a detailed conversation about the farm, its practices and any known health and welfare concerns or opportunities.

Where a health and welfare plan exists for a farm, this will be the initial place to start conversations between the farmer and their vet, with the review building upon those areas covered in the existing health and welfare plan. The review will recommend actions to improve livestock health and welfare, agreed between farmer and the vet, and will be a way to measure yearly progress. It will also potentially signpost more support available to the farm for making these improvements, including upcoming grants.



NSA has raised the specific issue of breeding animal movements.

## Moving sheep from Great Britain to Northern Ireland

The recent update on the Movement Assistance Scheme, to support businesses in maintaining trade between GB and NI, is to include scrapie testing costs.

However, NSA fears this is going to be pretty limited in its value. Our understanding is the costs (vet time and lab fees) will be covered for genotype testing (irrespective of pass or fail), but a commitment must have been made for the sheep to go to Northern Ireland if they pass – i.e. it will probably only be applicable for direct farm-to-farm sales.

Separate to this, NSA is pleased the Northern Ireland Protocol is to be discussed further with the EU – and has therefore raised the specific issue of breeding animal movements. Rather than use Article 16, we would prefer to find a consensual path. Urgent talks are required to find a new balance for the protocol – one which fully respects Northern Ireland's place in the UK market, while maintaining the integrity of the EU's own market.

It is a priority to get onto this path quickly, to give Northern Ireland the stability and certainty it needs. The EU has indicated its willingness to continue to engage and find solutions. NSA recognises the significant efforts put into considering responses to some specific issues, such as livestock movements, the movement of assistance dogs, and aspects of the issues being faced on medicines. This is welcome and important, as of course is the EU's own commitment to protecting the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

## More detail to come on Lump Sum Exit scheme

As much as we were able to considering the detail available, NSA was in the process of responding to the Government's consultation on its proposed Lump Sum Exit scheme as this magazine went to press.

While NSA agrees with the concept of a scheme that supports both those that see changes to farm support as a step too far and feel it is the right time to retire, and those with energy wishing to enter farming or expand their businesses, it is not yet apparent if the Lump Sum Exit scheme will deliver what the industry needs.

Concerns have been raised over what the tax implications might be, but information will not be available until the autumn when Defra has completed discussions with HMRC. Insufficient detail on this and other aspects means NSA cannot do much more than keep a watchful eye on the situation as it develops.

# Need to learn from existing environmental schemes to meet net zero targets

High on agendas, both across the UK and globally, are actions to address climate change and achieve net zero targets.

With COP26 set to be held in Glasgow in November, there is a great opportunity for biodiversity, nature and landscapes, agriculture and soil management for productivity to be given appropriate attention. It's also an opportunity to focus on delivering realistic and appropriate strategies and actions, supported by good evidence and data, to enable net zero targets to be reached.

The Conference of Parties, or COP, is a forum of countries coordinated by the UN, and this year will be the 26th conference, hence COP26. Since its inception, climate change has moved up the agenda from being a fringe issue to a global priority. The objective of COP26 will be to engender working relationships to allow countries affected by climate change 'to protect and restore ecosystems, build defences, put warning systems in place and make infrastructure and agriculture more resilient to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods and lives'.

The UK levy bodies are working together on communications activities around COP26, with QMS building the COP26 communications pack to include positive messaging, infographics and consumer focused messaging. Through the various working groups in which it is involved, NSA ensures the views of the UK sheep industry, as part of the red meat sector, are represented.

## Climate

With or without COP26 being hosted in the UK, each of the devolved nations now has climate change as a particular focus. In Scotland and Wales the respective governments have recently appointed specific ministers, while in Northern Ireland two private members bills have been put before Stormont. For England it comes under the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy with a Minister of State appointed in January 2021. But what is consistent across all of the devolved nations, to a greater or lesser extent, is that agriculture has a role to play, alongside other industries, in achieving targets.

The net zero target for the UK as a whole is written into law. Other targets, including landscape and nature recovery for example, can be expected to follow in the not-too-distant



Climate change is a focus for all the devolved nations.

future. This then sets the agenda for the actions required to achieve these targets. Included will be a review of how we use land, how we produce food and how we protect nature, among the targets applicable for other industries.

NSA believes this is where clear structured direction, practical solutions and support mechanisms are desperately needed. But there is still a long way to go with many uncertainties to get a handle on – frustratingly, another common thread across all of the UK nations. Where the opportunities do exist to get involved, experiences suggest there are key learnings to be had before schemes are rolled out in full in the future.

Commenting on applying for the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot, NSA Vice President Bryan Griffiths, says: "All parties must recognise it is a pilot in every sense of the word. It will work for some, and parts of it will work differently for others. And some of it will require modification to make it practical. But by taking part we have the opportunity to understand what it will mean and, at the same time, be able to have our say when providing feedback to Defra to guide how and where changes need to be applied."

Bryan's wife and business partner Liz comments on how SFI, like many other government schemes, relies on the participants doing preparatory work beforehand. "It cannot be assumed the information held about you, your business and farm is up to date," she says. "Or that mapping is correct."

Chris McWhirter, a tenant farmer on a Devon-based county council farm, said for someone not

previously participating in countryside schemes, the system lacks clarity: "Which make it more difficult to understand exactly what to apply for and what evidence will be required to stay within the rules of the scheme."

## Development

All three believe the pilot is proving to be a moving target, with some significant rewrites since the first edition. There is a lack of definition of some of the timelines for payments, but farmers will typically be able to complete an application, although specialist advice may be required by some. Furthermore they all agreed how being involved in the pilot gives the best chance of the development of future schemes, which reward farmers for environmental and other public goods.

The challenge for livestock production, particularly the red meat sector, will be to ensure a balanced approach is maintained, with due consideration of the current and ongoing work to reduce emissions, and the relevant sustainability metrics and measurements being employed to assess progress. Results must also be truly reflective of the most appropriate production system. As was highlighted during June's NSA Breakfast Club webinar, it is more than just carbon.

NSA will continue to monitor, assess and report on new developments to assist members as they strive to demonstrate the good being done every day to protect nature, the environment and the climate, while providing healthy food for the nation.

# Enthusiastic stance from new Welsh Minister for climate change

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



In mid-July, NSA Cymru/Wales Region held its first combined meeting with Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Rural Affairs, and Julie James, Minister for Climate Change.

This was a constructive meeting and we learnt responses from the White Paper consultation will be summarised by September and the Agri Bill for Wales will not be passed until next Easter.

The Climate Change Minister was enthusiastic and detailed how she wants to work with, not against, farmers regarding tree planting, and how Welsh Government was looking at possible safeguards to protect land from being bought by large commercial companies. The use of wool in insulation was mentioned and how valuable wool could be in the future. But the value needs to come back to the farmer to make this a more viable option.

We have extended an invite to both Ministers to join NSA and the Black Mountains Land Use Partnership to see how collaboration works, and to visit a sheep farm to discuss carbon footprinting.

## Scab progress

The pilot project for sheep scab has taken place and a report is due to be published shortly. Given how significant a health and welfare problem scab is, and the urgency needed to address it, perhaps any underspend from the

RDPE project should be made available to extend the pilot project within Wales.

Welsh Water has relaunched its free pesticide disposal scheme. The scheme offers farmers, growers, gamekeepers, foresters and other land managers the opportunity to safely dispose of any unwanted, out-of-date or unlicensed pesticides and herbicides for free. Registration for the scheme is open until Monday 23rd August for people in Wales and some parts of England. Details of how to register and a map of catchment areas is on the Welsh Water website.

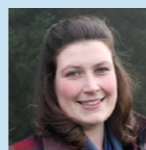
## Farm safety

In the past few issues of Sheep Farmer, we have highlighted awareness of wearing helmets when riding quad bikes, and NSA Cymru/Wales Region also encourages members across the UK to take up the offer of training when you purchase a new quad.

Ensuring the bike is mechanically sound – focusing on brakes, steering and tyres pressure – is also essential. But this is not the only area where, as an industry, we need to improve health and safety. Tragically, on average, 33 fatalities occur on British farms each year. This horrific statistic needs to be addressed. The opinion piece, on page 54 of this issue, highlights why we should all be taking farm safety more seriously.

# Scottish sheep sector's planned direction of travel soon to be revealed

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



Many of us are acutely aware of the differing pace at which the devolved nations move regarding policymaking.

In Scotland it had been anticipated that, by now, we would be more aware of what our future may look like. But we are still eagerly awaiting an announcement. Countless reports have been surfacing throughout 2021 but, even with the added complication of a Scottish Parliament election, the hope remains for the planned direction of travel being revealed shortly.

## Assurances

In a recent meeting with NSA Scottish Region and the newly appointed Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, Mairi Gougeon MSP, assurances were made, due to the nature of the valuable and vital work done in terms of practical proposals, that the work of the farmer-led groups will feature in new policy and recommendations. It was recognised the trust that's been built must be delivered upon and industry, as a collective, needs to be worked with rather than against.

Land-use reform is certainly important in relation to this, and is a pinnacle point yet to be determined. This includes the facilitation of opportunities for new entrants, particularly regarding the lack of land availability and conflicting targets within the countryside to achieve net zero targets. While the commitment towards full rates of Less Favoured Area payments were

made clear, any potential changes to this current structure in the interim period to 2024 are to be explored more extensively before any decisions can be finalised.

## Frustration

Unsurprisingly trade deals came up in conversation and the overwhelming frustration and concerns around the clarity of production standards, as well as the argument of offshoring our emissions. This would, ultimately, undercut our domestic industry and consequently quash any net-zero target accomplishment.

Due to the everchanging nature of the world we cater for and live in, it is abundantly clear how farmers are being asked (yet again) to reinvent themselves. The resilience and capability of our national shepherds cannot be taken for granted. Correct messaging of sustainable food sources, protein production and local food sourcing is key.

We have many things to celebrate and none more important than the place of sheep in Scotland. Our landscape would certainly not be any better if our shepherds were not around.

NSA Scottish Region looks forward to working with the new Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers to ensure the new direction of Scottish agriculture reflects the value of what we can contribute – not only via production but also in environmental and social terms.

# Northern Ireland focuses on sheep scab and a more targeted response

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



With scab getting increasing attention in other parts of the UK, it is positive that the Scab Steering Group here in Northern Ireland is continuing to meet.

The group comes together under the chairmanship of vet Paul Crawford. A number of issues have been identified and solutions suggested, but the situation created by Covid-19 and lack of funds hinder progress.

There is still a significant stigma associated with talking about or admitting you have scab present on your farm. A similar situation existed in the past around infectious causes of abortion. Now farmers actively investigate if there is a problem and seek preventative measures. Other conditions, such as ovine pulmonary adenomatosis, are becoming easier for farmers to talk about. The more people will talk the more others are likely to talk – word of mouth works. Remove the association between scab and being a bad farmer – good farmers can get scab in their well-managed flocks too. And this is why we need an industry-wide, collaborative approach.

## Openness

I believe enforcing scab's notifiable status could potentially prevent farmers from talking about or asking for help with scab. There is a concern about what restrictions might be imposed and this may also lead to some being unwilling to test. We have to remember some farmers do not have a good working relationship with DAERA. Reporting scab should lead to help for farmers – to remove it from their flock and help prevent spread or early identification in neighbouring flocks. This might be part of the role of a local scab coordinator.

And we need a coordinated approach. Identify areas with a high scab prevalence and target them. Use trained facilitators to ensure all flocks in an area or sharing common land treat in an organised manner – if not on the same day – inside the window of protection offered by the product used, considering the date the initial flocks in the area were to undertake treatment.

Within the most recent meeting, discussion focused on how to ensure everyone got involved and included training, education and someone working alongside the farmers to

provide practical assistance and ensure treatment is delivered accurately – each and every time. Discussion also focused on how to ensure all sheep were treated, particularly with regard to gathering from common grazing and ensuring tight boundaries to prevent immediate re-infestation once any protection period ended.

## Approval

In issues away from sheep scab, a second climate bill is to begin its path through the Northern Ireland Assembly. Agriculture and Environment Minister Edwin Poots received approval from the executive to progress his version of a Climate Change Bill. It joins an existing private members' Climate Bill, which is already being scrutinised by the assembly. Mr Poots' bill has a less stringent target and a longer time frame than its rival, and draws on the recommendations by Lord Deben's Climate Change Committee. This suggested Northern Ireland adopt a cut of at least 82% in emissions by 2050.

The private members' bill would see a tougher target, which would have to be reached sooner. Opponents claim its net zero by 2045 target would damage the agriculture industry. The sector is the biggest emitter in Northern Ireland, responsible for around 26% of greenhouse gas emissions.



Sheep scab should be spoken about in away that removes the stigma of having an outbreak.

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Most sheep farming in Britain is based on regenerative principles.

# Answering public demand for high welfare and provenance

By Sean Riches, NSA

A recent public survey, carried out OnePoll for the NFU, revealed 88% of respondents feel it is important for Britain to have a productive farming industry, and 86% felt British farmers should be protected from imports through trade deals where animal welfare standards fail to match those upheld domestically.

As an industry, the time is ripe to capitalise on this positive attitude to promote all that is good about British sheep farming. We must create a strong brand for British lamb and mutton to own a place in consumers' hearts and minds where cheaper imports produced to lower standards cannot. We have a great story to tell and now is the time to tell it.

Primarily this is the role of levy bodies, but we can all play a part to amplify and complement those messages – be it collectively as NSA, or as small groups involved in seasonal activities, or ad hoc as individual farmers.

## Fertile ground

We have fertile ground to do this, as farming and food have been in the public eye a lot recently. Recent stories have included the launch of the National Food Strategy report; the Committee for Climate Change report; the extensive commentary on the proposed Australian trade deal and its potentially damaging consequences for British farmers; the ongoing disruption to trade from Brexit; and HRH Prince Charles' essay highlighting the connection between small farms, sustainable diets, food production and the protection of natural resources and nature.

Consumers need to be suitably informed, to continue to care and show their support. Polls carried out on behalf of Which? show how consumers want the UK's high food standards to be maintained in all post-Brexit trade deals. Figures also show they are specifically worried about livestock farming standards being compromised in order to secure trade deals. In the absence of a clear vision from the Government on where it sees UK livestock farming in the future, and with apparent friction between domestic and international policies, the sector has a golden opportunity to capitalise on the reputation of sheep farming as being both trusted and popular within food production. As an industry we now have an opportunity to take control of our destiny by feeding the appetite of public opinion.

Most sheep farming in Britain is based on regenerative principles and, to a large extent, works in harmony with nature. There are many examples where it is the basis of agroecological farming and this is a large part of plans for restoring farmland wildlife and biodiversity. While it is recognised how much is being done by sheep farmers to protect nature, it is also acknowledged

there are opportunities to do more and not to rest on our laurels.

NSA Chairman Dan Phipps considers where some of those opportunities lie. He says: "In a new age when the terms regenerative and sustainable farming are on the tip of everyone's tongue, I feel now is the time for regenerative and sustainable relationships between arable and livestock farmers to redevelop.

"Living in East Anglia has given me a greater awareness of what livestock bring to the areas they are farmed in. Land that can be cultivated has been ploughed for intensive cropping, while so much of the land grazed by sheep now is as a matter of necessity. Economics have led to this situation.

"Modern arable farms have made large fields for efficiency, chosen to purchase nutrients from a bag, and organic matter often comes from chopped straw – previously diverted to livestock. This has all played a part in the demise of many a breeding flock during the past couple of decades, particularly on this side of the country.

"But this should not mean this land continues to be devoid of livestock. Sheep can bring so much more to the land they graze. The principles of regenerative and sustainable farming were and are taught at agricultural college. The importance of organic matter and rotational cropping, with break crops for livestock farms to protect soil health, are how we manage the relationship with nature and the environment. Many farmers have stuck with these principles, and I hope they gain recognition for standing by what they would simply refer to as good farming.

## Environment

"We need to build back our relationships and our flocks to aid soil health recovery, soil fertility and nature, as well as maintaining the skills and enthusiasm of our workforce while enhancing the environment in which we farm. To do this while protecting our rural communities and feeding the nation with home-produced lamb of the highest quality, farmed to the highest standards, must be the right future."

The trend to shop local offers a huge opportunity to strengthen the relationship between producers and consumers, and to build on provenance and speciality foods. Consumers increasingly want to know where the food they eat comes from and how it's been produced and, as has been seen during lockdown, more are keen to support local businesses. So they need to be informed. If this trend continues it will not just be the smaller independent shops supplying these foods – we can expect the supermarkets to also respond.

We can all play a part, as many already are, to spread the word within our wider families, social networks and communities. Our aim should be to get more people talking and motivate them to the point where they propagate

our message organically. Modern communication and social media make this much easier today, but traditional methods are still effective, such as promotion in local venues, including pubs, restaurants and cafes; regional and local newspapers; local events; and even local radio. These are key touch-points where consumers can be reached and are more likely to be receptive to information.

NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Chairman Kate Hovers supports this view. She says: "Our upland environment has been shaped by farming across several centuries. Tourists visit to enjoy this and we need to talk to visitors who are also consumers about how we care for our sheep and maintain and enjoy the landscape. The recent HCC publication 'The Welsh Way' shows how sustainable farming can be part of the solution to climate change. Research has shown farmers are often the most trusted part of the food supply chain, but are the least recognised. We need to use our voices and make them heard, and talk about farming with and for nature."

Levering emotional triggers is an excellent way to get a message out there. This can include associating eating lamb with special events, family occasions and celebratory meals, and the pleasure and enjoyment gained from a good meal in convivial surroundings, particularly as the nation emerges from lockdown. Create a bit of a buzz around a special event.

## Flexibility

Love Lamb week is only a few weeks away. This offers so many opportunities where the local butcher, farm shop, restaurant and/or pub can help portray just how flexible sheep meat is for today's consumer. There will be materials available for use on social media and in retail outlets to help promote some great recipes and point towards even more information and support available online and in-store. Look out for more details during the coming weeks and, in the meantime, ask your local pub what they will be doing to support.

Recent market analysis shows lamb consumption has increased since 2019. This is due to several reasons, but it is a trend upon which we must build. Assuming consumers will simply continue to support local is dangerous. Every opportunity to promote and raise awareness of what is available locally should be used to capitalise on this trend.

Even prior to lockdown there were probably an increasing number of restaurants, pubs and hotels who were stating the provenance (source) of their menu ingredients. Now is the time to encourage consumers to look for this and lean on food establishments to be more transparent about their sourcing practices. Let's get local farmers on the menus in our pubs, restaurants, hotels and takeaways.

A challenge in advertising is doing something different to the norm. This can be achieved, but not always easily, by placing adverts in unexpected and unusual locations, or in an unusual way. They can literally stop people in their tracks, making them one of the most effective examples of grassroots marketing. Our farms have an enviable shop window, where messages, images and information can be displayed in many different forms. For example, simple banners are a cost-effective, but hugely visible means of informing the public and can be put up in many different ways. Let's get creative and share what is being done to inspire others.

One of the biggest mistakes, given the relatively high current profile for food and farming, is assuming effective communication has happened. There is a mantra within marketing communications that a brand must 'say it seven times' before a message sticks with a consumer. There are several phases from receiving new information through to it actually resulting in actions. Repetition helps progress through these phases. Saying it seven times doesn't mean to say it verbally over and over – although it won't hurt. The message can be reinforced in multiple ways, and through different advocates who can add their perspective.

Love Lamb Week starts on Wednesday 1st September.  
More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lovelamb](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lovelamb).

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Pre-lambing ewe rations often contain soya as a vital protein source.

## Reduce and remove – soya alternatives suit the environment and margins

Soya use in sheep rations is small in comparison with amounts included in dairy, pig and poultry diets.

Nonetheless, there is growing pressure on sheep producers to remove soya from sheep rations, in a bid to reduce the carbon footprint of lamb production and mitigate climate change.

“Sheep producers feed very little soya to their flocks,” says independent sheep consultant Kate Phillips. “Most of it is in ewe rations, fed for just six weeks prior to lambing, and in lamb creep feeds.”

So why is there pressure on farmers to reduce and remove soya from sheep rations, and where is it coming from?

“Some of my farmer clients are choosing to remove it from their sheep diets. They recognise its environmental credentials and they are under increasing pressure to use alternatives. And they want to farm in a more ethical and sustainable way,” says Ms Phillips.

“Not only is much of it grown on former rainforest land, but it’s also shipped for thousands of miles.”

There is widespread concern about increasing global production of soya bean and palm oils, which doubled between 2000/01 and 2018/19. It is associated with deforestation, soil degradation, destruction of wildlife habitats, and the loss of natural grasslands in some regions of the world.

This all gives it a bad image among the general public. And farmers are under pressure from their customers – typically the major supermarkets and retailers – who are looking to satisfy consumers that their food has a lower carbon footprint.

### Complex

UK agriculture does need to reduce its environmental impact and soya use has a key role to play here. The livestock industry has a complex carbon footprint and reaching net zero will be a challenge, according to Bryn Hughes of Wynnstay. But with optimism, he says: “The industry’s understanding and knowledge of greenhouse gases is increasing. And mechanisms to achieve net zero are becoming more evident.

“The good news is the sheep industry, in comparison with other livestock sectors, is in a good position. Production is typically extensive and reliance on inputs is low. A balanced argument could be had in favour of sheep meat consumption, because it has a low impact on the environment.”

He adds that, looking at the sheep feed industry, there are several points to address and put into context. “In comparison with other livestock sectors, sheep and lamb compound feed is not a large tonnage. The overall market for sheep and lamb feed varies according to season but stands at around 600,000 tonnes.

“Many ingredients within these feeds are co-products and unsuitable for human consumption. Average soya bean meal percentage inclusions, for example, would be in the low single figures.

“So sheep and lamb feed is not a major contributor to the deforestation problem and there are probably greater gains to be achieved elsewhere.”

Mr Hughes adds, however, this may be an over simplification and not an approach that’s in the best interest of the sheep industry. “There may, indeed, be a huge opportunity here to promote the green credentials of lamb.”

He says most feed manufacturers are members of the Agricultural Industries Confederation and have signed up to a sustainable road map document. “There are a number of actions progressive feed manufacturers are taking to help with improving the green credentials of feed,” he says.

### Alternatives

“The use of soya and palm kernel are often mentioned as problem areas in discussion with retailers and consumers. There are alternatives, but these can often be associated with increases in on-farm costs.”

That’s certainly not the case at the moment, though, with the current high soya prices that are still rising.

“There are good alternatives for sheep producers. Diets can be formulated without soya and will meet the metabolic requirements of high-performance ewes,” says Mr Hughes.

Ms Phillips agrees, saying treated protein sources, so more protein bypasses the rumen, can achieve the same results. “Non-soya diets can achieve the same performance and there won’t be an impact on ewe or lamb performance,” she says.

Reducing – rather than removing – soya in rations can be a start, possibly by switching to a treated-soya product, which has a higher level of rumen undegradable protein. In systems that take the approach of giving pregnant ewes 100g of soya per lamb carried with good quality silage in the final few weeks before lambing – so 200g for a ewe carrying twins and 300g for a ewe carrying triplets – switching to protected soya, which increases the level of rumen undegradable protein, means this can be cut to just 50g per lamb. Soya use is halved.

Alternative proteins include rapeseed meal, homegrown beans and wheat distillers’ dark grains. And work, led by Kate Phillips and carried out at Reaseheath College for AHDB Beef & Lamb in 2013, showed no difference in ewe and lamb performance when these feeds were compared with a soya protein-based ration.

### Sustainable

But a change in attitudes and perceptions is required if these diets are going to be popular. Some manufacturers are only using sustainable soya in their feed, and sheep and lamb diets are now readily available from this source.

Carbon footprints are also readily available for all feed ingredients, and are documented in a comprehensive database produced by Global

Feed LCA Institute (GFL). Compound feed will, in time, have carbon footprint information readily available for farmers.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says it could be argued soya use on sheep farms is a bit like antibiotic use. “The sector is a low user and it could be argued whatever we do is just a tiny splash in a huge ocean. But we are in an era where responsible and considered assessments of everything we do is required,” he says.

### Resilient

“Ensuring sheep nutrition is resilient and sustainable, and we establish a level of permanence within our sheep farming systems, is vital. But our reputation and minimising the sector’s carbon footprint is equally important in positioning sheep production as sustainable, regenerative and responsible.

“Soya is not necessarily bad per se, but a significant proportion of the crop is associated with the destruction of primary habitats and huge food miles. It also has an unhelpful relationship with early GM technology and multi-national corporate control.”

Mr Stocker points out there are assured sustainable sources of soya, at a price – but also the potential to grow it ourselves. He says: “I’ve seen soya growing here in the UK as part of

a rotation, just like peas and beans. Soya, like lupins, and maybe other high protein crops could be grown more reliably in Britain as summers become warmer.

“But while ‘hard feed’ is likely to continue to be an important part of sheep farming, even if only for short periods of the year, the British sheep industry is, in my opinion, in a good place due to its high reliance on grass and forage. And we know there is even more we can do to produce more lamb from this most sustainable of crops.”



Creep feed is another soya hot spot for sheep sector.

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# Young shepherds successfully step up to complete competition

Young shepherds were expecting to show off their skills, with tasks including sheep shearing and ATV handling, at the national finals of the NSA Next Generation Shepherds competition in 2020.

Despite that being cancelled, the group of enthusiastic young sheep farmers have finally had the opportunity to demonstrate their passion and adaptability to complete the competition – in a way none of them had expected.

With ongoing Covid-19 restrictions preventing a face-to-face gathering of the young shepherds from all nations of the UK, the competition was moved online with the finalists tasked with showing off their video and online media skills, in addition to shepherding, to compete for the title of NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year.

## Victor

Emerging as both the victor of the under 21 title and overall NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year was 19-year-old Harry Lyons, from Cheshire. Harry wins prize money of £1,000, kindly donated by competition sponsors the Texel Sheep Society, and a crystal bowl presented by NSA as a memento of his win.

Also performing well for NSA Central Region was second-placed competitor Jack Charleton, who is Assistant Farm Manager at Chatsworth Estate, Derbyshire. Jack is also an NSA Next Generation Ambassador.

## Profile: Harry Lyons

Harry, who represented NSA Central Region, impressed the judges and claimed victory with an excellent demonstration of practical skills and knowledge of the UK sheep sector.

He recently graduated from Reaseheath College, Cheshire, with a Level 3 Extended National Diploma in Agriculture, and he has his own flock of pedigree Suffolk sheep.

"I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the online competition," says Harry. "But it wasn't as good as doing it in person. It was a shame not to meet the other competitors in the final and find out what they do."

"Among our many challenges was a marketing task for Love Lamb Week. This was the most difficult part of the competition for me because I've never done anything like that before. But doing it helped me to realise just how important marketing and public perception is to the British sheep industry."

## Experience

"I am now really tempted to enter the 2022 competition. I have left college and am trying to expand my business. I'm increasing the size of my commercial flock, so finding the time to compete could be more difficult. I also hope at some point to travel to New Zealand to experience sheep farming there and bring some new ideas back with me."

Completing the top-three line up was contract shepherd Matthew Fearon from Cumbria, representing NSA Northern Region.

Competition organiser Helen Roberts said: "Congratulations to all the competitors and, of course, Harry as the overall winner. In what has been very different and difficult circumstances, the young shepherds have taken time out and shown a commendable effort to complete this competition and everyone at NSA extends thanks to them for that. Thanks must also go to the Texel Sheep Society for its continued support of this competition, and to our experienced competition judging team."

*Regional heats are being held this summer for the NSA Next Generation Shepherd final in 2022, to be held at the NSA Sheep Event. More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).*



NSA Activities & Campaigns Officer Chris Adamson (left) presents competition winner Harry with his crystal prize bowl.

Motivation to succeed is not only about competitions for Harry – he's extremely busy and determined in his working life. "I'm currently running a small farm near Macclesfield alongside my own sheep, and working towards producing MV-accredited Scotch Halfbred cross Suffolks, which will be sold as recipient ewes. My plan is to expand this operation and implement rotational grazing to help do this on the land that's available to me."

"Ultimately I'd like my own farm with all the land in one place, to make my business more efficient. My biggest ambition is to break the record for the highest priced Suffolk tup. It's a long way off, but I'm sure it could be done."

Despite not coming from a direct farming background, Harry is committed to the sector and encourages anyone considering farming as a career choice. "Take every opportunity that presents itself," he says. "Get to know as many people as you can because many will be happy to help an enthusiastic young farmer. And pick one thing you are passionate about and try to do that as well as you can – that way you'll get noticed. And, remember, if it was easy then everyone would be doing it. So don't give up."



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# Next GENE-eration giveaway



As part of its successful Next Generation programme, NSA was pleased to recently team up with Rob and Jo Hodgkins, of Kaiapoi Romneys, to launch a new and exciting competition.

Named the NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway, the programme invited applications from young UK sheep farmers who would like to be considered as a recipient of a Kaiapoi Romney ram. Attracting a lot of interest, a maximum of five MV accredited, performance-recorded rams will now be given to up to five farmers in advance of the coming breeding season.

The giveaway has been made possible due to the Frank Parkinson Agricultural Trust, which donated funds to the Kaiapoi flock to import rams into the UK in 2019. The breed is known to carry the Myomax double-muscling gene.

## Initiative

David Gardner, Agricultural Trustee at the Frank Parkinson Agricultural Trust, says: "The Trust is delighted to have helped bring this excellent initiative to the sheep sector and looks forward to hearing how the rams make an impact on the recipients' businesses during the coming years."

The rams, each with an individual value of approximately £2,000, will fit well into low-input outdoor breeding systems, and the successful recipients will give feedback to NSA and Rob and Jo Hodgkins on the performance of the rams and their subsequent offspring.

"We have had the benefit of a lot goodwill from people and businesses during the years," says Rob Hodgkins. "So it's important to Jo and myself, now we are in a position to do so, to give back to the industry that has given so much to us. We hope, during the next five years of this giveaway, we can make some meaningful change to a lot of young farmers and their businesses."

NSA Communications Officer Katie James, who is helping to facilitate the giveaway, says: "This is a fantastic opportunity for the UK's next generation of sheep farmers and we are extremely grateful to Rob, Jo and the Frank Parkinson Trust for making this giveaway possible."

"The UK has some incredibly skilled and passionate young shepherds and shepherdesses who will be really deserving of this helping hand."



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It was good to meet, face-to-face, out on farm again.



## NSA Next Generation Ambassadors pick up where they left off



After a 17-month delay, the current cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors came together once again in July for a delivery session exploring upland environments and grassland management, in County Durham and Northumberland.

The Ambassadors spent the first day of the meeting getting to know each other after a long time of Covid-enforced separation, sharing progress they'd made since the first session held in February 2020.

NSA Operations Director Joanne Briggs then led them through some issue management and media training topics, arming them with skills to truly be ambassadors for the NSA and the wider UK sheep sector. NSA Northern Region Chairman Thomas Carrick joined the group in the evening, sharing his experiences since joining the NSA Next

Generation Ambassador programme six years ago. With an upland farm in Alston, Cumbria, Thomas led discussions ranging from future environmental support to joining a family partnership.

### Discussion

The next morning the group headed north to Duncan and Gus Nellis' beef and sheep enterprise, based at Thistlehaugh Farm near Morpeth, Northumberland. The brothers provided great insight into their grassland-focused business, generating useful discussion about production from forage, alternative forages and grazing strategies. This was emphasised when independent consultant Liz Genever joined the group to offer expert advice on grassland management, prompting discussion between the group as to which areas of their farming businesses or employment they would like to change or improve.

The third day began with a trip to Bollilhope Shield Farm, the upland sheep and beef

enterprise belonging to Graham Wilkinson and his family at Bishop Auckland. Fine weather meant a trip to the top of the fells to see Graham's flock of pure Swaledales and fantastic views across the farm's 7,000 acres (280ha). There the group took part in discussion about the challenges of upland farming and its future role in the sheep sector, particularly as it moves to a future where environmental management is set to become as big as a factor to consider as the sheep grazing it.

### Challenges

Then the group were once again fortunate to be joined by Liz Genever to look at the pastures on some of Graham's improved in-bye land. Flock Health vet Fiona Lovatt also joined the group and spoke about some of the sheep health challenges she has worked with Graham to overcome.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James, who also accompanied the group, says: "When the group applied to become NSA Next Generation Ambassadors they clearly did not envisage the timescale their year of delivery sessions would end up covering. So we are so grateful they have remained interested in the programme."

"The group of young sheep farmers certainly picked up where they left off in February 2020 and were as enthusiastic and engaged as ever, seeking to learn as much from our farm visits and speakers as they could. As always, we were lucky to have knowledgeable and welcoming farmers and consultants who were generous with their time and advice during our three-day meeting."

Read profiles of the Ambassadors at [www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk/ambassador-group](https://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk/ambassador-group).



The group of young farmers were enthusiastic and engaged.

# Careers in auctioneering provide vital service for farmers

A career selling livestock often appeals to youngsters growing up in farming families.

This was certainly the case for NSA Scottish Region committee member and auctioneer James Scott, who is working towards being an associate of the Institute of Auctioneers of Scotland.

James says: "The buzz of the market on sale day is unbeatable. Having experienced this growing up, combined with the sale of the family farm, I decided to venture into a career in auctioneering.

"I'm currently a trainee auctioneer and assistant sheep auctioneer at Craig Wilson Ltd, in Ayr, having just finished my second year of studying."

Learning to appreciate your customers fully has been key in his career so far, according to James.

"The most important thing I have learnt since qualifying is, unfortunately, you cannot make everyone happy. You are the middleman working to achieve the best for your sellers. Without them you have no job, so you must do your best for them every time you step into that box."

As consumer trends change and pressure to adapt is placed on the farming community, James anticipates more challenges for the sector.

"The most surprising thing I've encountered is how undervalued lamb is. With the apparent rise of veganism and the potential implications of trade deals with countries of lower farming standards, we need, as an industry, to increase positive messaging for products.

## Disappearing

"I also see the decline of the national sheep flock threatening the future. Our beautiful countryside here in Scotland is disappearing, replaced with rows of trees where I believe stock should be grazing. With more farms being planted with trees, it is becoming almost impossible for new entrants to get into farming – unless you are lucky enough to have a spare few million pounds sitting in your bank account.

"But there will be ways to overcome this if the older generation look into more ways of succession planning. Contract farming is becoming



You must do the best for your sellers every time you step into the box.

popular and there are other ways to assist the older generation to ease the workload while, at the same time, attract new blood to the industry.

"Who knows what the future will bring, but I hope I can keep stepping up into the box on a weekly basis to sell the high-quality stock placed in front of me. The old saying 'sell live and thrive' is key. I believe the best way to get the correct value for your stock is to sell it through the ring."



James Scott



Clive Roads, former chairman and partner with McCartneys and now acting as a consultant within the firm, recognises the changes that have been overcome and the different challenges the next generation of auctioneers will face.

"Back then, of course, a subsidy was in place for graded lambs. To ensure lambs did not receive more than one subsidy payment, a hole was punched in their ear. Can you imagine how the animal-welfare activists would view this today?"

"Buyers were a real cross section of private butchers, private and national wholesalers, and both live and carcase exporters," he recalls. "Live exporters were the 'real' competition, but not without repercussions from those against the practice. Physical aggression reigned for lorry drivers and vicious verbal threats were volleyed at us as auctioneers."

Clive considers the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak as the cause for many of the changes witnessed during the past 20 years. "Traceability through EID has been significant and EID as a management aid has been brilliant. Technology continues to change at an amazing pace, offering greater speed and efficiency throughout the sector.

## Carcase

"The buying dimension has also changed – live exports have been overtaken by carcase exports. And while individual butchers and wholesalers are obviously important, their numbers have diminished." He adds that an extremely valuable and growing sector is the ethnic community with its appetite (literally) for lamb and mutton, both at home and on the continent.



My advice for the stars of the future is to be open minded and embrace change.

"As an 'old hand', my advice to the stars of the future is to be open minded, embrace change to improve all aspects of the industry, be mindful of sectors trying to undermine the live auction system, and face up to and address the everyday challenges that occur. I still believe the future for our sector looks good."



Clive Roads

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The sale of pedigree Texels is an important part of the farm enterprise.

# Breeding key to success of premium Welsh flock

By Gaina Morgan, contributor

Marketing has been Graham Jones' focus since he began farming, and is an asset now he is the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman.

He and his wife, Mary, were quick to spot the importance of the Texel breed to produce premium sheep after they moved to a tenanted farm in the South Wales Valleys in the 1970s.

They now farm 240 acres (100ha), with commons grazing, and have modified their farming to suit the constraints of the high uplands

in Nelson, north of Cardiff. The years have progressed and their farming has evolved to suit a slightly slower approach to life, while producing premium pedigree sheep and cattle.

They now also farm a further 40 acres (15ha) in Raglan, Monmouthshire, and their system matches Graham's belief in keeping sheep to suit the environment. They run a mix of 80 pedigree Texels and a 300-strong commercial flock of Welsh Mountains. Older hill sheep are crossed to the Texel and yearlings to a Bluefaced Leicester, for ease of lambing.

## Saleable

He says: "I believe, wherever you farm, you have to keep the sheep to suit the environment. These sheep definitely suit us.

"Obviously, the Welsh Mountain breed is indigenous to the area, the Texel is tough, and the Bluefaced Leicester gives them the ability to be a good mother and quite hardy. This cross suits our purpose here on a high upland farm.

"The females are saleable for breeding. We sell them in the livestock market in Raglan. They're a nice upstanding ewe and they're fresh looking. And, obviously, with the Bluefaced Leicester in them, they have a mothering ability and are a high quality Mule."

The couple sell 30 shearling pedigree Texel tups a year, as well as 10-12 ram lambs. Around 300 finished lambs are sold at the local livestock



Graham and Mary Jones.

market in Raglan, along with 40 crossbred females and 35 pedigree yearling Texel ewes.

The Texel flock is lambed inside from mid February, brought inside just a week before and then sent out again as soon as possible. The commercial ewes are lambed partly out and partly indoors, starting this year on 20th March. The Texels are fed good quality hay or haylage and the commercial ewes are fed the best haylage or silage the Joneses can make. All are supplemented with an 18% protein nut.

Graham and Mary are well respected for the quality of their stock, having won many championships before they stopped showing in 2003. That said, Graham ruefully concedes they have tended to get the 'second ticket' at the Royal shows.

A renowned judge, he believes Texels have had a significant impact on the UK flock, as well as being the biggest breed. He was initially concerned about imported breeds bringing in disease and felt improving native breeds could yield the lean meat the country needed. Instead, he says he gradually grew to appreciate Texels and the benefits they offer. He bought their first ram, and his father bought a couple of ewe lambs in 1980.

They also run a herd of 20 British Blonde spring-calving suckler cows, selling breeding stock privately and the young stores at Raglan Market. Breeding bulls and breeding heifers are sold privately.

## Camaraderie

Mary, who comes from a Herefordshire cattle showing and pedigree background, particularly likes the camaraderie of the pedigree world. She says they first invested in the Texels as a hobby, but they have since taken over their lives 'for the better'.

She adds: "We have a good South Wales Texel Club. Graham was on the board for a long time and we were lucky enough to go to New Zealand with the Texel Society. We've made friends around the world – you get to know lots of people through pedigree breeding."

Mary is confident people will be keen to return to the huge choice available at breeding sales in August and September. And Graham is optimistic about the prospects for this year's NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales, following the cancellation of both sales in 2020 due to the pandemic.

"There was no way they could possibly have gone ahead last year, but we have met the Royal Welsh officials and they're supportive of making things happen this year," he says. "Given how keen members of our committee are, I'm sure it will be successful."

"There will be challenges and we will really have to be on our toes. Things may be slightly different to a typical year, but I think people will be glad to get onto the Royal Welsh Showground.

There hasn't been a show again this year, so the sales will be a warm up for the Winter Fair.

"I think we have to get the message out that if you go to Builth to buy then you'll have more choice, from a wide genetic pool. There's something to suit everyone's budget. We aren't inspecting this year, due to Covid-19 restrictions and precautions, but we're confident our vendors will maintain their high standards."

Graham and Mary have supported the sale since its inception in the late 1970s and aren't worried about competition from online sales, adding the farmer's eye is still as important as the data.

"Farmers know if they choose the wrong ram they have to look at him for quite a few years. So it's important to make the right choice."

Mary agrees, saying she is quick to criticise if she doesn't like something and usually wants to buy stock she can't afford!

## Attitude

Taking a broad view of farming and considering the pressures on land use, Graham is calling on the Welsh and UK governments to pay more attention to farming. He says he's been pretty disillusioned with the attitude to farming and working in the countryside in recent years.

"These are momentous times in the countryside and it's vital governments make the right decisions and changes. It's even more important for society as a whole that governments, both in Cardiff and Westminster, makes good choices. If they get it wrong, it will take many years to rectify."

"Politicians and civil servants really need to come out and meet the people on our farms. There's no substitute for actually meeting people."

"Members of the Welsh Senedd desperately need to re-engage with rural people and with farming. Just think of the proportion of Wales that's rural and dependent on agriculture."

Life and work are entwined and although each year Mary claims she's 'had enough of lambing', in reality she's determined to carry on.

They have no intention of hanging up their sheep-farming boots any time soon and Graham is relishing his role as Chairman of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales. It's yet another enjoyable challenge for the couple.

*Graham gave this interview before the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale in early August. Read the report on page 10. And don't miss the Main Sale on Monday 20th September.*

## Farm facts

- 240 acres (100ha) tenancy, with commons grazing at Nelson, north of Cardiff, plus 40 acres (15ha) in Raglan, Monmouthshire.
- 300 Welsh Mountain ewes, 30 pedigree Texels and a small suckler herd.
- Lambing in February and March.
- Sell 30 shearling pedigree Texel tups a year, plus 10-12 ram lambs, 30 pedigree yearling ewes and 40 crossbred females.
- Around 300 finished lambs sold annually through Raglan Market.
- Graham elected NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman earlier this year.



Sheep graze areas surrounding the local power station.

“I believe, wherever you farm, you have to keep the sheep to suit the environment.”  
Graham Jones



Farming as we know it is going to change, says Promar.



# Assess your business – and don't look back

By Laura Simpson, Promar International

For most sheep farmers the initial Covid-19 lockdown, back in March 2020, passed unnoticed during the hectic spring months.

Emerging from lambing was when most realised the extent to which the social landscape had changed. All agricultural shows were cancelled and taking stock to the market was suddenly a solitary and brief trip out.

A lack of these social gatherings, in an already isolated sector, has had a huge impact on mental health. On top of that, it has removed farmers' ability to benchmark their year. Pen and ringside at the local mart or show is often the first chance farmers have to compare lamb performance and get an idea as to how well they may sell later in the year.

## Change

Now, almost 18 months and another lambing season later, the only certainty the industry has is that further change is inevitable. It is hard to quantify how the increased duty-free quota agreement with Australia will affect the sheep industry. Or whether a similar agreement with New Zealand, which currently supplies 70% (61,250 tonnes) of the UK's total imports, will follow quickly on its heels.

The unveiling of England's plan to phase out the Basic Payment Scheme will be echoed across Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

But what does it actually mean in real money? Do farmers really need to know what silvopasture, agroecology and regenerative farming – to name but a few – mean? Yes, absolutely.

The industry now has no choice but to adapt in order to survive. It is time to assess how each area of the business performs, evaluating what is profitable and what isn't. Having an understanding of other possible options is also going to be vital.

Taking the QMS industry profitability figures as just one example, they show upland flocks, on average and before subsidy, made a net margin per ewe of £7.21 in 2020. Both hill and lowland flocks made a loss of £22.42 and £4.34 respectively. And flocks in the top third for financial performance across land types, relied on up to 75% more unpaid family labour than the bottom third.

These figures, albeit averages, show an ability to control fixed costs such as labour could result in a more profitable business. But is it realistic for farmers who want to survive post-subsidy to work longer and harder for 'free'? Or is the answer something different entirely?

Land has always been viewed as the way to physically support grazing livestock, but various sustainable farming and land initiatives are going to give farmers a completely different perception of their land's worth. While there is a real fear marginal ground is being pinpointed as the answer to Britain's need to grow more trees, this does not have to be a win-lose situation.

It would be unrealistic to say every sheep farmer is going to come out of this unscathed and, for some farmers, the idea that good ground may need to be taken out of agricultural use in order for their business to survive will simply be too much.

But, on the flip side, if a marginal change in land use makes businesses financially viable and allows farmers to continue to do the job they're passionate about, is it really a step in the wrong direction?

## Decisive

Now is the time to ask yourself what your farm is for. Look again at what it provides. Is it food, carbon offsets, amenities, or something else? Social pressure regarding how agriculture is viewed, as well as policy change, is likely to make the answer a mixture of several things. Understanding and executing this is going to take careful thought and decisive action.

As we continue to see Covid-19 ease, shows and sales will once again give farmers the opportunity to compare notes on the past year and share fears about the future of their industry, in an increasingly volatile market.

Traditional farming, as we know it, is going to change. But that's by no means the end of the story. Most farms have a wider value and there will be opportunities to use this to protect the future of farming.

So my advice is simple: assess the business honestly, disregard nothing, and don't look back.

# Markets are working hard to achieve best margins for farmers



Liveweight sheep prices continue to drive the trade, with the live sales ring providing the stability and security the sheep industry has needed throughout the unpredictable months of Covid-19 restrictions and Brexit adjustment, says the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA).

More than 11 million animals were sold through live sales rings in England and Wales in 2020, with turnover topping £1.8bn. LAA says this shows how influential the live system was in setting trends and prices, particularly during the early stages of the initial Covid-19 lockdown period.

These figures include just under 10 million sheep, a year-on-year increase of 370,000 from 2019. Significantly – despite Defra figures revealing a 3.7% drop in overall mutton and lamb production, and a 15% drop in slaughter numbers for ewes and rams – slaughter stock numbers for sheep sold through the live markets have increased by almost 5% to more than 6.8 million.

## Record spring

These numbers appear to have followed suit through a successful spring period across the country. "The red meat industry saw a record spring for lambs, with prices remaining very firm into June and many live markets averaging in excess of 315p/kg," says North West Auctions' Ian Atkinson. "Best quality and heavier weight lambs certainly sold to a premium this year."

"Spring 2021 saw great demand for all specification of sheep with lambs at foot. This was due to the strong trade for spring lambs, prime hogs and cast sheep. Despite the slow spring and one of the wettest and coldest May on record, demand remained buoyant, particularly to the end of May once grass arrived," he adds. "It was great to see plenty of demand for younger replacement sheep, such as hogs and shearlings with lambs at foot, with many vendors reporting averages £20 - £50 up on the year."

Alastair Brown of Bletsoes is seeing liveweight sheep prices still on a high compared to the last two years or probably more. He says: "Strong demand in the pens of all markets around the country shows the variable quality highlighted by the SQQs."

"Restrictions on travel and good weather have also had a positive effect on trade. Looking forward, prices are likely to stay reasonably good." As we head into the key part of the breeding sales season, auctioneers believe the view is extremely positive to match or even surpass 2020 figures, as restrictions ease and everything points to a good trade.

Securing these fair prices through a transparent and traceable marketing system is the crucial role of live sales, argues LAA Executive Secretary Chris Dodds. He says: "Livestock farms are small businesses and have little market

power compared to large-scale, corporate food companies.

Put simply, they are weak sellers if entering into private negotiations with powerful buyers and risk a transaction that under-values their animals.

"Within the live sales ring, neither buyer nor seller can unfairly influence the price. The auctioneer is an independent individual – working for both the buyer and the seller. They ensure the price is fair and it accurately reflects current demand based on available information," he adds.

In addition to this, Mr Dodds says the auction mart's role as a social institution within the rural community has perhaps been highlighted even more during the Covid-19 restrictions, when the patience and support of both vendors and buyers has been essential.

"LAA has appreciated the support and understanding of our clients and operating member marts during the various restrictions," he says. "Our priorities are always to protect public health while, at the same time, still being able to supply the food chain."

Remembering 20 years ago, when the markets shut down during the foot-and-mouth outbreak, hundreds of thousands of animals were slaughtered. Yet the sector still took a massive hit despite the lack of numbers, as the price of stock collapsed.

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

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# Authentic, traceable British wool direct to the consumer

As part of its consumer focused marketing strategy, British Wool has launched a consumer-facing e-commerce website, selling an array of British-wool-rich products including clothing, duvets, pillows, knitting yarn, insulation and even dog beds, direct to the consumer.

"This is a development to help drive consumer demand for British wool products," says British Wool's Graham Clark. "We are initially working with 10 licensee partners and plan to increase this as we develop the product offering during the next few months."

The organisation will also receive a commission on every sale made through the site. And this additional revenue will be returned to British Wool producers.

Mr Clark says: "We plan to integrate the site into our social media plans. We have more than 114,000 followers and our current website also has around 14,000 unique visitors each month, and an increasing proportion of the visitors are consumers looking for information on British wool products."

"We see the new site becoming the number-one destination in the UK for genuine British wool products, helping us drive sales and demand, and ultimately increasing the returns our producers receive for their wool."

## Traceable

Traceability and the provenance of products are becoming increasingly important to socially and environmentally conscious consumers. To meet this growing demand, British Wool is also launching a 100% traceable wool scheme for companies buying large quantities through the British Wool auction system. The new scheme traces the origin of wool from the farm gate to the shop floor.

Mr Clark says companies will be able to sell products allowing customers to understand where the wool within it comes from. "It also gives them peace of mind producers have been paid a premium for their wool," he adds.

The scheme will initially include wool from three of British Wool's largest depots – Bradford, Newtown and South Molton. The three sites process almost 50% of the wool handled by British Wool.

"Although this is the scheme's first year, we anticipate that more than 500,000kg of traceable wool, from a wide range of types, will be

sold through our auctions. Those producers whose wool has been selected to be part of the scheme this year will receive a premium for their 2021 wool."

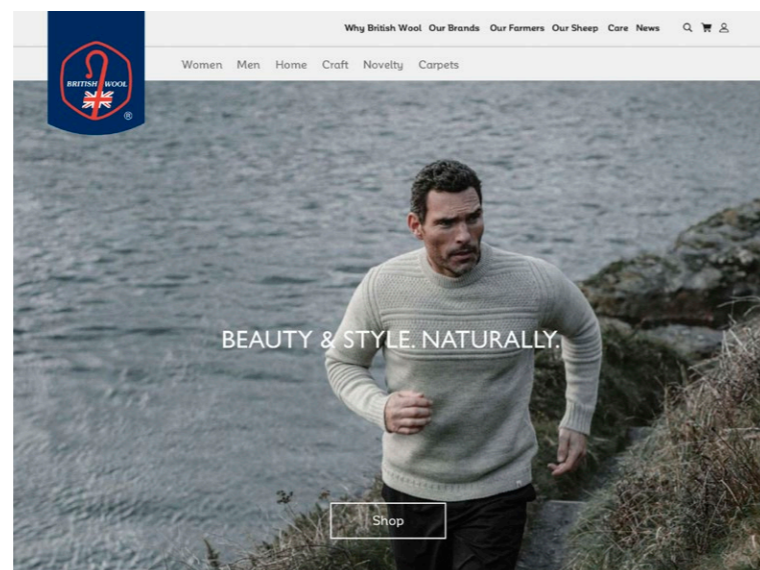


## Maximise

The scheme is designed to not only give full transparency to consumers but also to maximise the price producers receive for their wool. "As a farming co-operative, our primary aim is to maximise the value of our producers' wool," says Mr Clark. "This scheme allows us to achieve a premium from the brands we are working with, which we will ensure producers receive."

"We are launching this scheme in the sleep-product category, working with two leading brands in this market. These are Devon Duvets, which supplies 100% British wool bedding, and Harrison Spinks, which uses wool for its luxury natural mattresses."

"During the next few years we hope to work with a wide range of wool processors and manufacturers to offer fully traceable British wool products to the consumer, while also achieving better wool prices for producers in the long term."



Items can be purchased at [www.britishwool.org.uk/shop](http://www.britishwool.org.uk/shop).

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### What's new from Moredun? They're on the road this September and have more Science Stories online.

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Visit Moredun's new outreach and laboratory bus at Westmorland Show on 8th/9th September, featuring the Visible and the Invisible (Parasites!)
- **Centenary Science Stories**  
All four volumes, highlighting the best of Moredun's research over the past 100 years, are available to download.



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Roscommon – Sat 4 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Welshpool – Sat 18 <sup>th</sup> Sept
Ruthin – Mon 6 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Builth Wells – Mon 20 <sup>th</sup>
Thainstone – Tues 7 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Carlisle – Thurs 23 <sup>rd</sup> Sept
Ballymena – Sat 11 <sup>th</sup> Sept	Skipton – Thurs 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct

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## SALE DATES 2021

### EWES LAMBS SEPTEMBER

3 Hexham  
 4 Stirling  
 6 Castle Douglas  
 8 Lanark  
 11 Dumfries  
 14 Stirling  
 16 Huntly  
 17 Hexham  
 21 Oban  
 23 St Boswells  
 24 Dalmally  
 29 Longtown

### OCTOBER

6 Thainstone  
 8 Dingwall  
**RAMS**  
 OCTOBER  
 2 Newton Stewart  
 4 Ballymena

8 Dingwall  
 9 Stirling (UA)  
 9 Perth Ram Society  
 11 Hexham  
 11 Castle Douglas  
 13 Oban  
 16 Dalmally  
 18 Portree  
 21 Lanark - Shearlings  
 22 Lanark - Lambs  
**NOVEMBER**  
 4 Lanark  
 5 Fort William

### WETHER LAMBS AUGUST

Weekly sales of store lambs held at all auctions.

### GIMMERS AND EWES SEPTEMBER

6 Stirling (UA) Show  
 7 Oban Show  
 11 Dalmally Show  
 17 Dingwall Show  
 23 St Boswells Show  
 24 Lanark Show  
 25 Forfar Show  
**OCTOBER**  
 19 Longtown Show

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These dates may be subject to change. Due to Covid-19 restrictions the sales will be held under the regulations at the time. Please check the auction marts web sites and the Blackface web site and Facebook page for up to date information.

# Sheep advisers signing up as RoSA members to benefit industry



When NSA joined forces with BASIS to create the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA), both organisations felt there was demand for accreditation of sheep specialists – but it was still a step into the unknown.

But any reservations were swept away with more than 40 advisers applying for membership within just two months of the register opening. With more applications coming in, the sector can be confident it now has a way for advisers to attain and maintain a qualification, and a method by which farmers can seek out quality advice when and if they need it.

One of the first advisers to sign up was Bryn Hughes, a beef and sheep specialist with 15 years' experience, currently working for Wynnstay in South East Wales. He sees benefits in the scheme for himself, his company, his farmer clients and the wider industry.

"It will complement the advisory work I do with sheep farmers on a daily basis, and make it easier for them to identify trustworthy professional advice," Mr Hughes says. "A lot of advice is given by individuals working in commercial organisations such as consultancy companies, vet practices or, like myself, an agricultural supply company. RoSA will make it easier for sheep farmers to contact advisers, particularly within large companies, who have the necessary skills to assist them – and provide reassurance they are getting professional advice from company employees.

"RoSA also brings the sheep industry in line with other agricultural sectors, where professional registers have been in place for decades. These registers encourage best practice and helps the implementation of new and voluntary industry initiatives. They also underpin consumer confidence, reassuring the many parties interacting with agriculture that professional advice is being sought and standards are constantly monitored."

One of the main principles of RoSA is that members have a rounded knowledge of sheep farming – not just expertise in one area. Mr Hughes agrees with this core standard, saying it is vital given the complex nature of sheep farming and its links to rural communities, food, textiles, environment, tourism and well-being.

## Specialism

He says: "An understanding of all these aspects is important, and any potential impact needs to be taken into consideration when offering advice. For example, my specialism leans towards sheep nutrition and performance. This includes ration formulation and a lot of advice on growing forage. But I'm currently looking at opportunities that may be available to sheep farmers in regenerative agriculture."

In addition to being a RoSA member, Mr Hughes has also agreed to join the RoSA Steering Group – a small collection of RoSA members overseeing the operation and direction of the register to ensure it is fit for purpose for members and farmers as the scheme establishes itself. As with other group members, Mr Hughes is

giving his time voluntarily to help the new scheme succeed.

"It's early days for the RoSA Steering Group, but I hope to achieve a number of goals by sitting on it," Mr Hughes says. "The group has a diverse membership, covering all aspects of sheep farming. I'm there because of my background in sheep nutrition and my role within a large supply company.

"I hope we can oversee the development of RoSA into an industry-leading advisory register. I think it's important from the outset that members of the register have an outlook on what will continue make the sheep industry a viable and vibrant part of UK agriculture. The steering group has an important role to play in coordinating advice to achieve a successful sheep industry."

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

## Collect CPD points with NSA

Individuals working within sheep sector ancillary services and needing to collect continuous professional development (CPD) points each year can now use their NSA membership to count towards the total.

Members of the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) can claim two points per year for being an NSA member. They must collect 40 points per year to maintain their membership status (or 20 points a year if they are associate members).

Suitably Qualified Persons (SQPs) who hold their qualification with Vetpol can also claim 15 minutes of accredited CPD for each article they read in NSA Sheep Farmer magazine, if they submit to Vetpol a short review of the article and state why it was of value to them and their role.

NSA hopes to work with additional bodies awarding CPD in the future, where appropriate, so please let us know of other organisations you would like to see us make a link with. More at [www.sheepadvisers.co.uk/publications](http://www.sheepadvisers.co.uk/publications) and [www.vetpol.uk/being-a-sqp/vetpol-accredited-cpd](http://www.vetpol.uk/being-a-sqp/vetpol-accredited-cpd).



RoSA allows advisers to gain accreditation and sheep farmers access quality advice.



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# What can I do to improve my flock's carbon footprint?

By Liz Genever, contributor

More sheep farmers are carrying out carbon audits to measure their footprint – some due to a request from their processor or retailer, and others because they want to know if they are close to achieving the net-zero target.

Their next challenge is working out what to do with the information and then taking steps to reduce their carbon footprint.

Although the existing metrics behind carbon calculators are challenged by more recent research on methane life cycles (GWP\*), for sheep, like all ruminants, carbon footprinting suggests around half of the emissions are from methane produced from the animal. Even when GWP\* metrics are used, it is beneficial to reduce methane output.

## Efficiency

Methane production is driven by feed intake, which in turn is driven by bodyweight (heavier animals eat more) and the number of days on farm. Ewe efficiency is crucial because it is about keeping the minimum weight of productive adult sheep while still producing kilos of lamb. The industry target is for ewes to rear 65% of their bodyweight to the point of weaning. For example, a flock of ewes averaging 70kg/head and rearing 1.7 lambs should be weaning lambs at 90 days at an average weight of 27kg, to achieve the target (1.7 multiplied by 27 divided by 70).

Common carbon footprint hotspots for sheep systems are:

- **Fertility**  
Sheep systems aim for optimal fertility, rather than maximum. The ambition is to match scanning percentage with the type of sheep and resources available. Ewes, for example, on the side of fells don't want twins or triplets, while those in the lowlands and on good ground should rear two lambs.

Lamb survival is crucial to optimal fertility because there is a risk, when more lambs are scanned, of higher mortality without appropriate management.

**Action:** Look at your current figures, and industry targets for fertility and mortality, to identify areas to focus on, such as high lamb mortality between scanning and lambing.

- **Ewe mature size**  
Ewes are, typically, getting bigger and some farmers are switching breeds to counteract this. But it comes back to the total lamb weight ewes need to wean to justify their extra bodyweight.

**Action:** Weigh some ewes to measure the flock average and compare it with weaning weights.

- **Lamb growth rates**  
Lamb growth rates are influenced by a range of factors including genetics, health and nutrition. The industry targets for lowland flocks are a group average of 20kg at eight weeks old and 30kg at an adjusted 90 days of age. This should be achieved with minimal bought-in feed use, with most growth off grass and forage.

Typically, fewer days on farm means lower greenhouse gas emissions, but this needs to be balanced with feed inputs. The advantage with ruminants is they can utilise a range of feeds and forages, but strategic use of home-grown or bought-in feeds can be justified if it cost-effectively accelerates growth and weight gain.

**Action:** Monitor eight-week and weaning weights against industry targets.

- **Feed use**  
Around 95% of energy within sheep systems is provided by grass and forages. There are key times when feed use is higher – late pregnancy, lactation and creep feeding lambs. It is not about saying do not feed concentrates. Farmers must optimise feed used by maximising the value of grass and forages through good silage making and grassland management, and use of specialist crops, such as red clover, which help finish lambs without additional feed.


Bagged feed is often easier, but is around four times more expensive compared to grazed grass.

**Action:** Calculate feed use per ewe and identify when it is being fed.

- **Fertiliser**  
Sheep farms tend to use lower levels of nitrogen fertiliser (around 50kgN/ha or less). But the focus should be to increase the amount of legumes in grazing and silage fields, through re-seeding, over-seeding and good management, to reduce the reliance on fertiliser and to improve stock performance. Soil pH and structure are fundamental to legume establishment and nutrient efficiency.

- **Fuel use**  
Sheep systems will be low users compared to arable but it may be worth monitoring, particularly if fields are spread out or stock is frequently moved.

The top three hotspots – fertility, mature weight and lamb growth rates – influence methane production and mean livestock efficiency is crucial. Feed and fuel use are more about reducing the direct carbon dioxide production from their manufacture or use, and fertiliser (organic and non organic) and soil management is partly carbon dioxide and partly nitrous oxide. Completing your own carbon audit will help you identify your farm and flock's hotspots, as well as which records and KPIs are the important ones for you to track.

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



Ewe efficiency is about keeping her weight to a minimum while still producing kilos of lamb.



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# Breed survey reveals increasing role of crossbred rams and ewes

The survey asked questions about flock management practices.

Completed for the fifth time since 1971, the latest Sheep Breed Survey has again provided a unique insight into our changing industry.

Of particular interest is the increase of both crossbred ewes and rams in the national flock, and a continued move away from the traditional stratified system in favour of terminal sire-based crosses.

The number of crossbred ewes in the national flock increased from 56% to 58%, indicating a small reduction in purebred ewe numbers compared to 2012. The three main hill ewe breeds (Scottish Blackface, Welsh Mountain and Swaledale) dominated the pure-breeding sector, but all three were declining in number – more than 1,000 less Scottish Blackface flocks reported in 2020.

The figures show size and number of hill flocks producing recognised crossbreeds (such as the Mule or Halfbred) is also in decline. The main types of Mule ewe (North Country, Welsh and Scottish) made up 18.8% of the national flock (compared to 20.5% in 2012), but crossbreeds of other types now contribute significantly to the crossbred ewe population.

## Crossbreeding

The traditional 'stratified crossbreeding' nature of the British sheep industry (using crossing rams on hill ewes to produce crossbred females that are kept on lower ground) was still identifiable. But the ratio of stratified to non-stratified sheep has declined from 55:45% in 2012 to 51:49% in 2020. A second crossbreeding structure can be identified based on terminal sire breeds crossed to various breeds and crosses, with the female progeny being retained for breeding.



Breeds of sheep found in Great Britain.

By Sarah Measom, AHDB

More than a quarter of the rams used in Britain were Texel – a similar market share to 2012. The Suffolk was the next most numerous ram breed. When considering the genetic contribution of the different breed types to lamb output, the terminal sire breeds dominate the picture. They sired 58% of the lamb crop and contributed 41% of the genetic makeup of the lamb carcasses produced in Britain.

The proportion of rams reported to have estimated breeding values (EBVs) varied across breeds, with 8%-12% of the rams from the largest terminal sire breeds having EBVs, while less than 3% of the hill rams had them. Specific breeds are known to be engaged in considerably higher levels of performance recording and the under-reporting of recorded stock was acknowledged.

## Information

The use of EBVs when buying rams was highest in the larger flocks and those producing finished lambs for the market. In each case around 10% of producers always used EBVs when buying rams and around 40% sometimes used them. However, many producers still don't use this information for ram selection. The main reason for not using EBVs was cited as a lack of access to the information.

One significant finding was that the proportion of purebred rams used in the national flock has fallen from 93% to 83% during the past eight years, with both composite and crossbred rams increasing their market share.

There were 99 breeds recorded in the 2020 survey. New breeds were either imported foreign breeds or re-imported UK breeds, such as New

Zealand Texel. A number of new composite strains were found and often in sizeable numbers.

Certain breeds have increased in numbers in recent surveys. These include the Texel and its derivatives (recently due to their use in maternal lines), and the Lleyn and the Easycare. Not surprisingly, many breeds are declining in numbers and several were not found in the 2020 survey.

## Dominate

The Lleyn breed has continued to dominate the non-hill sector with about half a million ewes found in 2020. Half were mated pure and the rest to a variety of ram breeds. Lleyn rams were mated to 400,000 ewes. Wool-shedding breeds, such as the Easycare, Exlana and Wiltshire Horn, were found to be growing in number with around 250,000 ewes mated in 2020.

The survey asked farmers questions about their flock management practices. The body condition scoring of ewes was used at least once a year in about 75% of flocks, but around 30% of flocks never weigh their lambs.

The majority of flocks did not take sward height measurements to manage their grassland, or use electronic identification to manage their flock beyond current legal requirements. These findings are important when considering future opportunities for knowledge exchange, looking at which practices have been successfully adopted, and which are underutilised or less valued.

Full survey results at [www.signetdata.com/technical/projects/sheep-breed-survey](http://www.signetdata.com/technical/projects/sheep-breed-survey).

## Why survey sheep breeds?

In autumn 2020, 38,000 sheep farmers in England, Scotland and Wales were invited to take part in the Sheep Breed Survey, the fifth time since 1971 and the first time since results were published in 2012.

About a fifth of the survey forms were returned, with the useable data representing 16% of sheep farmers and 11% of the breeding ewes in Great Britain. Survey results were scaled up to national level using 2020 December Survey data, which indicated there were 13 million ewes mated in 2020, which is similar to the number in 2012.

The survey is an important reference point for researchers, funders and policymakers. It provides a unique insight into how the industry has changed over the past 50 years and will help assess how the coming social, economic and political change of the next decade will influence the lowland and upland sheep sectors.

The survey doesn't just quantify different breeds of sheep, it also explains the structure of the industry, the degree to which stratification influences the industry, and how current breeding policies will influence future lamb production.

It informs supply chains seeking to market meat on the basis of system, breed, region or carcase weight. Baseline data is key to the work completed by levy bodies, as well as organisations like NSA, breed societies and universities.

The survey offers information about the past but, more importantly, it helps farmers and the industry to plan, define future breeding goals, assess the value of levy-funded knowledge exchange, and guide research to enhance the economic and environmental efficiency of UK sheep production.

NSA hugely values the survey and encouraged members to respond. It was run by AHDB/Signet Breeding Services and funded by AHDB, QMS and HCC with support from British Wool. Data analysis was completed by Royal Veterinary College's Geoff Pollott.

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# Genetic selection key to enhancing flock efficiency

By Ed Brant, AHDB and Signet Breeding Services 

The recently completed EWEBenefit project will introduce a number of new breeding values to the industry and increase the total number of traits analysed in Signet's maternal evaluations to 25.

That said, it is the simple ability to assess ewe weight that may lead to the most important changes in breeding programmes.

EWEBenefit aims to introduce a new multi-breed approach to evaluating maternal breeds, including the Lley, Romney, Roussin, EasyCare and Exlana, which will enhance their economic efficiency and reduce their environmental impact.

From 2022, breeding values for traits such as ewe longevity and lamb survival will be routinely included in Signet's evaluations. These will sit alongside existing breeding values that influence lamb output through their impact on growth rate, or by enhancing maternal performance in terms of the milk production and prolificacy of the ewe. Capitalising on advances in capability to capture weight data through the use of EID and farm software, new breeding values have also been developed to assess ewe mature size and body condition score.

## Attributes

While it is easy to use genetic selection to enhance flock output, it is more difficult to improve efficiency. Genetic improvements in lamb growth rates will inevitably lead to increases in ewe mature weights. But by measuring both attributes it is possible to develop breeding programmes that limit increases in the size of our ewes and help select for more efficient individuals.

Variation in ewe weight within the Lley breed.



Exlanas are one breed that will benefit from a new approach to maternal evaluations.

Data for Lley ewes, for example, highlights the variation within a breed (see table). While much of this variation is due to environmental differences between farms, there is potential to influence ewe weight through genetic selection. These considerations are particularly relevant since AHDB-funded research, carried out by AbacusBio, proposed the optimum mature size for lowland ewes is 55-65kg, although this figure clearly varies between farms.

This work does not suggest light ewes are good or heavy ewes are bad. It shows ewes must be bred to rear a high weight of lamb relative to their mature size in order to enhance flock efficiency. This recognises larger ewes tend to cost more to keep during the year (particularly the winter), resulting in a lower stocking density.

From 2022, Signet will routinely produce EBVs for ewe weight and body condition score prior to mating. During the run up to mating, Signet-recorded flocks with both lowland maternal breeds and hill breeds will be advised to run

their ewes across the weigh scales and submit a weight to Signet, with a body condition score if practical. A management group should be supplied if ewes have been kept under different conditions during the season.

## Heritability

What's exciting about growth traits is their high heritability, which means they are easy to change through selective breeding. So when selecting rams to breed female replacements, buyers should continue to select rams with high EBVs for traits of interest – whether this be to enhance lamb growth rate or maternal attributes, such as milk and prolificacy. That said, from 2022 they should also use the new EBVs for mature size to avoid animals with extremely high values if increasing ewe mature size is a concern.

New breeding indexes to highlight the most efficient breeding lines are starting to be developed, which will aid this decision-making process. And the development of breeding values for body condition score will also help to select ewes that are better equipped to retain body condition.

If the value of selecting the right terminal sire is worth an extra £4-£5 per lamb, then the value of selecting the right maternal sire will be far higher, because these genes will be expressed in the flock for many seasons. So when selecting maternal sires, farmers should think about whether they want high output or high efficiency and use EBVs to select accordingly.

EWEBenefit was funded by AHDB and CIEL. More at [www.signetdata.com](http://www.signetdata.com).

Mature weight of Lley ewes that are two shear or older (kg)	Number of records	Proportion of weights
<45	3869	4%
46-55	21239	19%
56-65	38762	35%
66-75	32467	29%
76-85	11960	11%
>86	2208	2%

# Protect flock health – and carcase quality

By Sean Riches, NSA

Recent data from a major sheep meat processor has indicated an increase in the number of vaccination related abscesses, leading to carcase condemnation and financial losses.

While not a large number, it does suggest an increasing trend. And, as we move into a vaccination heavy season, it is worth remembering the essentials of good vaccination practice to minimise the risk and to optimise the efficacy of the vaccine.

This is especially true given that increased attention on preventative practices to reduce antibiotic use will hopefully lead to even more vaccine use. While vaccines can offer a significant cost-effective return it is also wise to ensure correct use and administration.

## Prevention

Vaccines are not a silver bullet for disease control, but do play an important role in disease prevention and control programmes within the flock health planning process. Alongside good animal and farm husbandry, careful planning and robust biosecurity, best vaccination practice offers the greatest chance of producing an effective response to the vaccine. Correct vaccination mimics infection without causing major disease symptoms and so provides immunity in the event the animal faces a disease threat in the future.

To take full advantage of this preventative approach, and to avoid carcase damage, vaccines must be used correctly. Vaccination is not complex, but there are certain factors to be considered to ensure vaccines work.



Photo courtesy of Linda Dawson

Using an automatic vaccinator is recommended.

With sufficient forward planning, vaccinations can be scheduled to fit in with other sheep tasks when there may be more labour available and to make it more worthwhile to gather sheep. Instructions from the respective pharmaceutical data sheets must be read and followed, along with advice from your vet. Putting information into a simple calendar is helpful and ensures both the vaccine and staff are available to make the vaccination task as efficient as possible.

## Instructions

There are no short cuts with vaccines. Put simply, vaccination works when a vaccine is stored and used correctly by closely following the manufacturer's instructions (dose rate, dose interval and lifespan after being opened), set out on the leaflet supplied with the product.

Administered at the wrong dose or time, or failing to complete a primary course of two injections a few weeks apart, means the vaccine will not deliver the expected protection. Furthermore, correctly following recommended booster programmes is essential to maintain adequate ongoing protection.

The recommendations for administration to reduce the risk of damaging carcase value are:

- Subcutaneous vaccinations are best given in the neck. On the side of the neck, choose an area in the middle, pick up a fold of skin, and inject into the space underneath the fold, so you are injecting into the space under the skin and not into the muscle or any of the associated structures.
- Intramuscular vaccinations are also best given into the neck – insert the needle at 90° into the neck, about 50mm behind and below the ear.

There are other factors that also determine the success of vaccination – some relate to the animal and others to the environment. And not only on the day of vaccination, but also during the priming of the immune response and at the time of any disease challenge. Points to consider include: age of the animal, physiological status, nutrition, concurrent disease(s), parasitic infection(s), stress, concurrent treatment(s), climatic conditions, and husbandry/environment.

More at [www.ruma.org.uk/vaccines](http://www.ruma.org.uk/vaccines) and [www.noah.co.uk/briefingdocument/vaccination-animal-health-overview](http://www.noah.co.uk/briefingdocument/vaccination-animal-health-overview).



Subcutaneous and intramuscular vaccines should be given in the neck.

## Guidelines for vaccine use

- Vaccine usage should be based on a risk assessment as part of a flock health plan. Some should be used routinely.
- Vaccines are complementary to good hygiene and nutrition.
- Always read the vaccine datasheet for details and check the minimum age for administration.
- Administer vaccines – both primary courses and boosters – at the correct vaccination site and at the recommended dosages and intervals.
- Separate vaccinations by at least two weeks unless licensed for concurrent use.
- Don't vaccinate ewes within three weeks prior to tugging, or ideally at least six weeks for rams.
- Transport and store vaccines at 2-8°C.
- Vaccines have specific timing requirements. Read the insert leaflet for details.
- Unless stated otherwise, the shelf life after first opening the immediate packaging is eight hours.
- Ensure good hygiene throughout. Do not vaccinate wet or dirty sheep.
- The use of an automatic vaccinator is recommended, plus the Sterimatic system to disinfect the needle between doses.
- Follow manufacturer guidelines to the letter and record the full detail of your usage of vaccines in an animal medicine book.
- Don't forget tups in your preventative health and vaccination programmes.



Preparation is key to making sure your rams are ready to start work.

## Timely focus on ram health and condition increases longevity

By Liz Genever, contributor

As we head towards ram purchasing season and tugging, now is a good time to revisit the findings of work carried out by NSA.

Funding secured by NSA facilitated research by independent sheep consultants Lesley Stubbings, Kate Phillips and Chris Lewis to look into welfare and longevity of commercial rams.

Preparing your rams 10 weeks prior to tugging is key to ensuring they are fit, healthy and ready to start work. Good preparation should aim to eliminate sub-fertile rams, allow the use of

fewer rams of higher quality, and to have fewer returns to service and ensure a compact lambing. Conducting a ram MOT will boost both his and your ewes' productivity.

If rams are being used in single-sire groups, or if the ewe-to-ram ratio is being increased, it may be worth involving your vet. Rams need to be examined 10 weeks before tugging begins. It is important to establish rams are fit to breed.

### Condition

It is possible to improve ram body condition or health, but if their teeth, feet and testicles are beyond repair, they need to be culled and replaced. This is why 10 weeks is recommended, as then there is time for replacement rams to be sourced, quarantined and acclimatised to on-farm conditions. This time will also allow any treatments, such as vaccinations, parasite (worms, lice, fluke, scab) control and feeding programmes to take effect.

Focus on the five Ts – teeth, toes, tone, testicles and treatments – when checking rams.

If a ram has lost teeth, or if he has become long or thin, he may not be able to eat well and gain weight before or after tugging. The ability not to maintain body condition is likely to affect his performance and he should be culled.

Examining toes means assessing lameness, which could affect a ram's ability to serve ewes. So his feet may need attention to prevent or treat foot problems. Also check for arthritis in the legs of older rams.

Rams should have a 'toned' body condition score of 3.5-4.0 at the start of tugging. It is important rams are in good condition as they can lose 15% of their bodyweight during a six-week tugging period, and the loss of too much condition will affect their performance.

Rams should be able to gain condition off grass and forage alone, with thin rams towards the end of summer being considered for culling. If rams are struggling with condition, their diet could be supplemented with a high-protein (18% crude protein) feed 10 weeks before tugging, which will also benefit semen production.

It is also important they do not have any vitamin or trace element deficiencies, such as zinc, copper, vitamin E/selenium or vitamin B12/cobalt. Seek veterinary advice on testing and treatment.

### Testicles

Ram testicles should be large and as firm as a flexed bicep, because sizeable and firm testicles produce 80% more semen per day than medium-sized soft ones. If a ram produces more semen he will be more fertile and fewer rams will be needed to serve the entire flock. And remember the semen-production cycle in the testicles takes approximately seven weeks, so ensure the ram is healthy and producing quality semen at least seven weeks before tugging.

Ram genitalia should also be checked for: ulcers on the prepuce; injuries, lesions and parasites on his scrotum; tone and size of his

testicles (grasp the top of the scrotum and gently push the testicles downwards. They should slide freely and be free of hard lumps); and size and tone of the epididymis, which should be free of hard lumps with a rubbery tone.

### Fertility

Two ways of improving the health of a ram's testicles, and therefore his fertility, are to prevent over-heating of the testicles in hot weather by shearing, providing shade and water, and ensuring he is not too fat.

Treatments – such as for worms, liver fluke, external parasites, lameness, clostridial diseases and pasteurella – should all be up to date. Louping ill vaccine should be considered in tick-prone areas.

Positive effects on ram performance will occur by ensuring teeth and feet are in the right condition to get them through tugging, and they are in the right condition to boost semen production with good health and welfare. It is likely that good preparation work each year will increase a ram's reproductive lifetime and also reduce the ram cost per ewe served.

See [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/news-pdfs/ram-longevity-final.pdf](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/workspace/news-pdfs/ram-longevity-final.pdf) for the full report.

## Ram longevity report's key findings

- Average working life of rams was 3.8 years, with farmers hoping for closer to five years.
- The majority of rams produce 250-350 lambs in a lifetime.
- Rams from maternal breeds tend to last longer.
- Only 35% of respondents always or mostly bought performance-recorded rams.
- Health status, conformity to breed type and breeder were the most important reasons when purchasing rams.
- Only a small proportion of farmers consistently carried out ram MOTs.
- 76% of respondents said they quarantined rams on arrival, but only around 13% quarantined for four weeks or more.
- Old age, lameness and poor condition were the most common reasons for culling.
- Use of a footrot vaccine increased in larger flocks.
- After old age and loss of condition, respiratory disease is the most common cause of ram death.

### Key recommendations

- Make sure rams are covered in the flock health plan, including a focus on timing of treatments and lameness.
- Ask ram vendors for details on feeding and health before purchasing.
- Be aware of the threat of iceberg diseases.
- Think about timing of sales. Is there enough time to allow for comprehensive health treatments and sufficient quarantine?
- Focus on the nutrition of rams throughout the year rather than relying on a 'feeding-up' period close to tugging.



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Friday 20 <sup>th</sup> August	Special Sale of BREEDING SHEEP inc EWES & RAMS
Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> August	Annual Sale of 6,500 SHEARLING GIMMERS, MULE, MASHAM & CONTINENTAL
Saturday 4 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of 400 PEDIGREE BELTEX SHEEP
Tuesday 7 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of 7,500 NORTH OF ENGLAND MULE GIMMER LAMBS
Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> September	PEDIGREE BLUE TEXEL SHEEP & PEDIGREE DUTCH SPOTTED SHEEP
Tuesday 14 <sup>th</sup> September	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sale of SHEARLING GIMMERS & Sale of all classes of BREEDING SHEEP + CHAROLLAIS RAMS
Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup> & Friday 17 <sup>th</sup> September	40 <sup>th</sup> Annual Sale of 600 PEDIGREE TEXEL RAMS & FEMALES
Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup> September	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sale of 10,000 MULE GIMMER LAMBS
Tuesday 28 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of all classes of BREEDING SHEEP & RAMS Evening Show & Sale of BLUE FACED LEICESTER SHEEP
Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of REGISTERED LLEYN BREEDING SHEEP SUFFOLK MVA & non MVA, BELTEX, CHAROLLAIS, BLUE TEXEL, ZWARTBLES, DUTCH TEXEL & Other MVA Pure Bred RAMS & FEMALES
Friday 1 <sup>st</sup> October	MVA TEXEL, TERMINAL SIRES & BROSS BREEDS ALL non MVA RAMS & FEMALES
Saturday 2 <sup>nd</sup> October	Annual Sale of 4,500 SWALEDALE EWES & SHEARLINGS
Tuesday 5 <sup>th</sup> October	Sale of SWALEDALE GIMMER LAMBS CONTINENTAL & OTHER GIMMER LAMBS Sale of MASHAM GIMMER LAMBS Open Prize Sale of MULE GIMMER LAMBS
Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> October	Pedigree CHAROLLAIS IN-LAMB FEMALES
Monday 11 <sup>th</sup> October	Special Evening sale of 120 SWALEDALE RAMS
Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup> October	21 <sup>st</sup> Annual Sale of 100 DALESBRED RAMS & FEMALES Sale of HILL RAMS inc 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sale of BFL Rams



Ram genitalia should also be checked prior to the start of tugging.

# Sheep scab project gains momentum in disease hotspots

The past couple of months has seen a flurry of activity on sheep scab associated with the RDPE-funded and SCOPS-supported For Flock's Sake sheep scab project.

The coordinators in three hotspot areas of England have been busy, with a lot of interest in the designated areas, and farmers now signing up to take part in the scheme. If you're in one of these areas and interested in taking part, contact your area coordinator. Farmers based outside the three clusters can still benefit from the information the project generates on scab control, and all farmers' help in encouraging others to engage in the project is invaluable.

While the eradication of sheep scab remains unlikely, acknowledging scab is endemic in the UK, removing the stigma associated with it, and encouraging more open communication means the industry can look to reduce incidence to a low and manageable level. That is why recruiting as many farmers as possible in the hotspot areas, as well as involving professionals from across the farming network (vets, auctioneers, health advisors and others) is essential.

## Outbreaks

Mike Glover of Torch Farm Vets is supportive of the project in South West England. He says: "In the wider Exmoor area, many flocks suffer recurrent outbreaks of sheep scab and they will welcome this fantastic opportunity to work collaboratively with scientists, trusted coordinators, local vets and neighbours to prevent repeat infection and improve the welfare and productivity of flocks."



Some flocks suffer recurrent outbreaks of sheep scab.

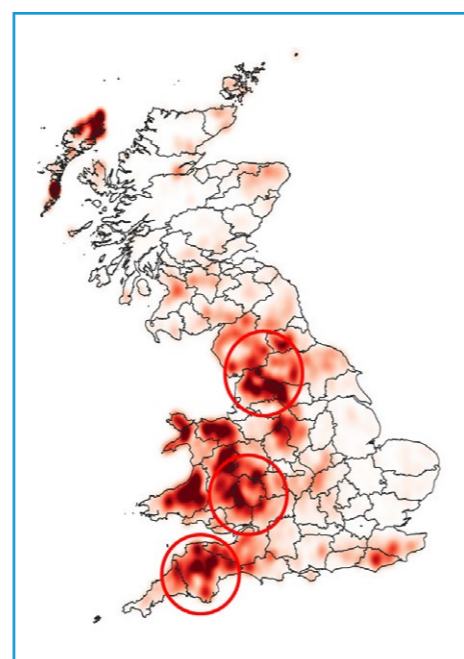
Local sheep farmer Matt Geen adds: "As a result of a scab outbreak in the area, we had some store lambs infected. After confirmation of infection via a skin scrape, we had to treat them. If we had been informed of sheep scab's presence in our area earlier we could have taken steps to prevent our animals from being infected and contributing to the circle of infection by being potential transmitters to others."

"The stigma around sheep scab must be removed, together with an acknowledgement by all sheep farmers of the importance of knowing the local sheep scab status and openly discussing the local situation to work together to coordinate control. This project is a great opportunity to make that happen, and we are keen to participate and help develop this community-led approach."

## Dipping

Effective plunge dipping in an organophosphate (OP) will be a vital tool for the clusters involved in this project. It will reduce pressure on the injectable products, which are the only other treatment for sheep scab, because there is evidence scab mites are developing resistance to them. Injectables also enhance selection for resistance in any worms the sheep are carrying at the time of treatment. Couple this with the fact that an OP dip will protect from re-infestation for up to eight weeks, which gives a good time window in which a whole cluster can treat and protect, makes dipping the preferred option where possible.

With fewer farms having their own dipping facilities, the move towards OP as a treatment means sheep farmers are increasingly working with contract mobile dippers. To help everyone



## Scab hotspot area contacts

**North West** (Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Northumberland) – contact the Farmer Network on 01768 868615 or email [admin@2thefarmernetwork.co.uk](mailto:admin@2thefarmernetwork.co.uk).

**Midlands** (Hereford and Shropshire) – contact Karen Wheeler (ADAS) at [scabherefordshropshire@adas.co.uk](mailto:scabherefordshropshire@adas.co.uk).

**South West** (Exmoor) – contact Sean Riches (NSA) at [sean@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:sean@nationalsheep.org.uk).

involved – and ensure dipping is fully effective and safe for the sheep, people and the environment – SCOPS has been working with NAAC to develop a Code of Practice that provides a checklist and useful links to other information. Make sure you know what you need to do to get the best from dipping and what you should expect from a professional mobile dipper.

Don't forget, to buy OP dip farmers must have a certificate of competence. If you don't have one of these, your contractor can use their certificate(s) to buy OPs for use in your flock, but they will need to have details of the sheep to be treated so that the person selling the dip can prescribe the product correctly.

Find the dipper Code of Practice at [www.scops.org.uk/external-parasites](http://www.scops.org.uk/external-parasites).



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TECHNICAL



# Buyers beware – is your flock protection good enough?

By Phillipa Page & Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health flockhealth Ltd

Each time sheep are purchased – be they replacement breeding ewes, ewe lambs or rams – sheep farmers put their flock and business finances at risk.

Not all flocks can be truly closed and breed their own replacements, and the UK sheep industry has successfully grown on a sufficient supply of replacement breeding ewes and rams sold between flocks. But, unfortunately, there is a lack of awareness about the risks associated with

buying and selling sheep from flocks of unknown health status.

We have become increasingly aware of flocks where performance has started to decline and where severe losses have occurred over a couple of years, with a disastrous effect on cash flow and profit. These situations are often the result of buying in sheep carrying an undetected disease.

So how can sheep farmers protect their flocks and ensure what they buy in is fit for purpose?

## Risk

In short, buying in sheep always comes with a risk to the existing flock. Minimising the risk and taking precautions will reduce the impact of buying in disease issues. Consider which group you fall into using the table opposite.

If you buy in sheep, it is impossible to fully guarantee no risk of also importing disease. So farmers must take steps to protect their flocks from new diseases or new strains of disease. Diseases that are transmitted from sheep to sheep include Borders disease, MV, CLA, Johne's, OPA, footrot, CODD, eye diseases, and sheep scab. Anthelmintic-resistant worms will be brought onto your pasture by sheep carrying them from their home farm, or by sheep not been treated effectively in the quarantine period.

It is crucial to have a plan in place, and ready to go, on the arrival of new sheep. The only way to guarantee treatments have been delivered properly is to apply them yourself.

The effects of some issues may go unnoticed for a number of seasons, particularly the production-limiting iceberg diseases. Flocks may start to see increasing numbers of ewe unable to gain condition after weaning, or a higher level of ewe deaths than usual.

Unless masked by creep feeding, these flocks may also see poorer-than-expected lamb growth up to weaning, due to reduced milk supply from their mothers. All these issues need investigating before the disease infects sheep throughout the flock, and the iceberg becomes unsurmountable and costly due to high replacement rates or low productivity.

## Disease

The timescale for noticing bought-in disease depends on the disease itself. CODD, virulent strains of footrot, or scab, will show up in the first few weeks and months. An incursion of Borders disease, enzootic abortion or campylobacter will show up throughout pregnancy or lambing as high barren rates, abortions and weak lambs.

Any concerns about the risks posed by bought-in stock should be discussed with your vet as soon as possible, and preferably before purchase.

Do not mix imported stock with the main flock for as long as possible, preferably after their first lambing, and certainly not until it is clear there are no disease issues.

More on quarantine advice at [www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites](http://www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites).



Blood tests can screen for exposure to MV, sheep scab, CLA or Border Disease.

Risk assessment for buying in sheep

Action	High risk	Moderate risk	Lower risk
Source of sheep.	Market – multiple flocks.	Market – one flock.	Direct from farm.
Health history of vendor's flock.	No evidence of vet engagement and no conversation/questions asked.	Flock has health plan/is engaged with vet, and will supply flock health history information.	Vendor engaged with vet. Monitoring for diseases to demonstrate a known health status.
Buyer – appreciation of risks/knowledge of disease.	Poor knowledge of diseases and little regard for any risk. Acceptance of lame sheep, doesn't mind the odd one.	Some knowledge of the risks of buying in sheep scab, wormer-resistant worms and infectious causes of lameness.	Aware of the risk of buying in sheep possibly carrying sheep scab, CODD, footrot, eye disease, wormer or flukicide-resistant parasites and production-limiting iceberg diseases (CLA, MV, Border disease, Johne's and OPA).
Seller – appreciation of risks/knowledge of disease.	Acceptance of lame sheep. Unaware or unconcerned about other diseases.	Some knowledge and will supply history of vaccines, wormers and scab treatments. Unlikely to present lame sheep.	Engaged with vet with proactive health plans in place. Aware of disease risk to buyer and working with vet to regularly monitor flock health/disease status.
Basis for purchase decision.	Price – lowest price and appearance of decent stock. Will accept poorer stock if price is low.	Happy to pay a reasonable price for good stock from a well-known farm with a good reputation, but often buys at market for best price options.	Understands value of buying stock with known and monitored health status, possible having learnt from previous problem purchases. Asks questions. Prepared to pay more to protect home flock. Strives for top physical performance from flock.
What do you do when your new stock arrive at home?	Keep in a field overnight – or separate for a week – before mixing with home flock.	Follow plan discussed with vet or advisor. Isolate for three weeks and worm, footbath and vaccinate. Act on signs of disease.	Follows a flock health plan, undertake monitoring diagnostics. Footbath and inspect feet. Treat for worms and fluke in a way to minimise resistant parasites, and take appropriate action to manage scab risk.
What do you do if sheep go lame shortly after arrival?	Treat them when you next get them in.	Catch ASAP and diagnose and treat appropriately.	Diagnose quickly, isolate lame sheep in treatment group until sound. If CODD is detected, and you do not have at home, treat in isolation until sound and then cull. Or speak to seller if CODD detected within a week of arrival and consider returning.

(CLA = caseous lymphadenitis, OPA = ovine pulmonary adenomatosis; MV = maedi visna. CODD = contagious ovine digital dermatitis)

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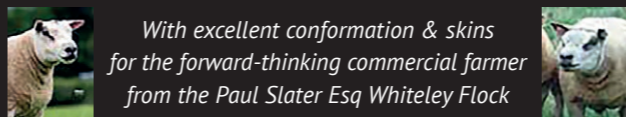
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Sheep are most at risk of acute liver fluke infection from August to October.

# Liver fluke treatment depends on effective monitoring

By Cormac White, Farm Vets South West **vetPartners**

Given the risk of treating too early or too late for liver fluke, working with you vet to monitor infection levels can pay dividends for your flock.

Sheep are most at risk of acute liver fluke infection from August to October and the liver fluke forecast can be used to decide when to start monitoring. Typically, the further north the farm, the earlier the onset, as the fluke larvae thrive in wet and warm weather.

## Lifecycle

Liver fluke has a more complicated lifecycle than many parasites, as it has an intermediate host – the *Galba truncatula* snail. After hatching in water, the fluke larvae seek out the snail in which they continue to develop through late spring and summer. In late summer and early autumn, liver fluke larvae (metacercariae) are deposited in the pasture, where they are ingested by sheep.

At this time sheep of any age can ingest liver fluke larvae while grazing, which continues the fluke's lifecycle by migrating through the liver and damaging it as they do so, causing acute liver fluke. At this stage, the liver fluke are immature and the only effective treatment is triclabendazole.

Correct timing of treatment is essential as triclabendazole only kills fluke in the animal at

the time of treatment. This makes treating too early a waste of time and money, as it is likely a repeat treatment will be needed following the ingestion of more larvae. Repeated exposure to the same treatment increases the risk of a resistance issue developing.

The traditional method of monitoring for fluke is to carry out a fluke-egg count. However, it can take 12-17 weeks between an animal ingesting larvae to when adult fluke are laying eggs in the liver. This means fluke-egg counts are only effective for picking up chronic fluke, when the eggs laid by adult fluke are released into the environment in faeces. Acute infections caused by immature fluke cannot be detected in this way.

An alternative option to detect fluke earlier in the season is to blood test lambs in their first year, to look for fluke antibodies. Sampling approximately six lambs in a group can give an early indication of whether they have been infected with early immature larvae and facilitate appropriately timed treatment.

Blood sampling ewes is not effective because fluke antibody levels will persist from exposure in previous seasons. Later lambing flocks may opt to keep a couple of lambs in with the ewes after weaning, as taking blood samples from these lambs can indicate when ewes are likely to have been exposed. This is also an option for flock retaining home-bred replacements, irrespective of time of lambing.

Alternatively early lambing flocks may use a cohort of six individual faecal antigen tests to detect early infection. These require dung samples from individual animals because pooled samples do not give accurate results. An antigen is effectively a biological marker in the faeces, providing an indication of immature fluke infection. Faecal antigen testing can pick up a fluke infection between two and four weeks after larvae ingestion – much earlier than waiting until eggs can be found in the faeces.

## Low-risk

While it is difficult on many farms, ideally sheep should be moved to low-risk pastures following treatment to reduce the likelihood of reinfection, which would require further treatments later in the season.

If multiple treatments are needed, it is important to have a planned approach and not rely entirely on triclabendazole, as sustained use will encourage resistance to the product. Talk to your vet or adviser about using closantel and/or nitroxylnil-based flucicides in rotation. While they do not kill fluke as early as the life cycle as triclabendazole does, they still have a vital role in control programmes.

Another thing to consider with fluke is the risk posed by buying in sheep. Proper quarantine protocol will prevent treatment-resistant liver fluke from the new stock being introduced to any snail habitat on the farm.

The correct treatment to use depends on the time of the year, age of the stock, existence of fluke on farm, and presence of suitable snail habitat. Where there is no snail habitat then bought-in sheep should be tested using faecal antigen for older stock or antibody for younger stock. And they should be treated with a triclabendazole product, at the correct time, if infection is detected. Where suitable snail habitat exists, sheep should be tested as described above and if infection is detected then two doses of closantel or nitroxylnil, six or seven weeks apart, is recommended.

Sheep should be kept on pasture with no snail habitat for at least four weeks following treatment because eggs can still be passed for several weeks following adult-fluke death.

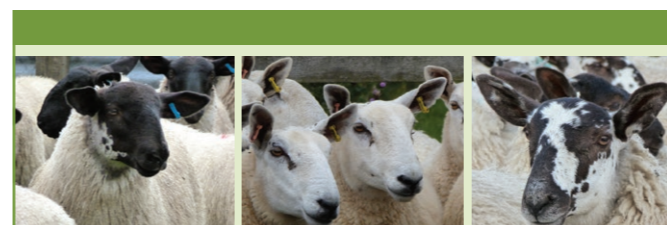
## Prevention

Risk assessing land to identify snail habitat and fencing off high-risk areas is an effective way to break the fluke lifecycle and preventing acute, sub-acute and chronic fluke infections. The snails thrive along the edges of sitting water, such as the side of ditches, ponds and boggy areas. Drier ground is always safer.

In any farming system, monitoring for fluke to enable timely action when sheep are infected will help reduce any economic impacts resulting from acute fluke infection in the flock.



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# Pre-tupping checks crucial to maximising number of lambs sold

Now is the time to undertake annual pre-tupping checks to ensure everything is set-up correctly for successful ewe pregnancies and lambing, with a focus ultimately looking at the numbers of lambs sold, rather than the number born.

"The condition of both the ewe and ram are crucial to the number of lambs born and, ultimately, sold," says UFAC-UK's Mike Chown. "So carrying out health and nutrition checks, and body condition scoring, are vital."

He also urges farmers to put vaccination programmes for abortion, clostridial and foot diseases in place at the same time, remembering abortion vaccines need to be administered at least four weeks prior to tupping.

## Optimum

Achieving body weight targets at the time of mating is critical, aiming for an optimum body condition score (BCS) of 3.0 for ewes, although with some differential between hill and lowland ewes.

"Hill ewes may have a slightly lower BCS," says Mr Chown. "But all ewes should have a minimum BCS score of 2.5. Anything below this needs 'feeding up,'" he adds.

He recommends aiming for a BCS of 3.5-4.0 for rams and for two months prior to tupping they



Check ewe and ram condition now to maximise reproductive performance – and the number of lambs sold.

should be fed a good quality, high energy 18% protein diet, because this time period is when sperm maturation takes place.

"Also, remove any excess wool from around the scrotum and testicles to keep them cool. This will boost the quantity and quality of the sperm," Mr Chown says.

He also suggests rams should be fed the essential polyunsaturated long-chain omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA, in a protein supplement, as well as high levels of selenium, to increase sperm vitality and mobility.

There is a similar recommendation for ewes. "These essential omega-3 fatty acids support the production of progesterone in sheep. It's the hormone responsible for the nourishment and maintenance of the embryo, thus improving

viability and reducing early embryonic losses," he says, suggesting this leads to improved lambing percentage and weaning rates.

"These specific omega-3 fatty acids are also considered as important modulators of immune functions," says Mr Chown. "Shortly after lambing, the fatty acids enhance ewe immunity and help to regenerate her reproductive tissues, ready for rebreeding.

"In late gestation, the fatty acids also play a vital role in lamb brain and eye development. This supports lamb survival and growth rates."

## Reproduction

With latest grass updates showing growth rates following the six-year average, Mr Chown believes there is nothing to be concerned about on a nutritional basis. But stresses farmers must be aware of any imbalance in minerals and trace elements.

"Over-supplying nutrients can be as damaging as any under supply, so always discuss grass and rations with your nutritionist," he says.

Mr Chown also suggests a slightly different approach to reproduction. "We should be thinking one plus two, or even one plus 2.5. And closer consideration should be given to ewe management, with a focus on egg size and quality, and the reduction of early embryo losses," he says.

Arguing that omega-3 EPA and DHA fatty acids can improve prolificacy and encourage more multiple births, he says increased conception rates and enhanced lamb survivability will ultimately lead to more lambs sold.

"Feeding 10-15g per head per day will improve the health of ewes and lambs, improving ewe longevity and reducing the number of barren ewes," adds Mr Chown.

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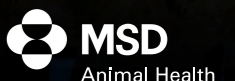


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# Orphan-lamb deaths – common causes and prevention

It may be months before the problem of orphan lambs rears its head, but forward-thinking now may prevent deaths.

A lot of time is invested in caring for orphan lambs, so deaths can be particularly frustrating. Recent cases seen by APHA illustrate common problems associated with rearing orphan lambs.

The first was on a unit where five deaths were reported to have occurred in a group of 30 orphan lambs fed powdered milk replacer. The affected lambs were seen to bloat 20-30 minutes after feeding. One lamb was submitted for post-mortem examination (PME). This lamb had been fed 60ml of milk and bloated up within 10 minutes and died. The PME showed that the abomasum was full of milk and the rumen and caecum were full of gas (see Figure 1).

## Bloated

The amount of milk found in the abomasum was considered large for the size of the lamb. Overfilling of the abomasum with milk can lead to the proliferation of gas-forming organisms and is much more frequently seen in artificially fed lambs.

On another sheep unit an eight-week-old lamb, which was being reared on ad-lib milk replacer and ad-lib creep, plus hay and straw, died and was submitted for PME. Significant PME findings included a bloated abdomen, which contained

a large amount of bloody peritoneal fluid. Also present was a twisted intestine (torsion) and the intestines were dark red and dilated with gas (see Figure 2).

A five five-week-old lamb was presented for PME from another flock to investigate the cause of death of three out of a group of 13 bottle-fed lambs. The most striking findings included



Figure 1: Rumen and caecum distended with gas in a lamb with bloat.

reddening of the intestines, which affected two thirds of the small intestines and a significant proportion of the large intestines. This is similar to red gut, which is a sporadic and fatal condition of ruminating sheep, and characterised by sudden death and reddened small and large intestines.

It usually occurs about three weeks after grazing

lush pastures, but may also be seen in artificially reared lambs.

In these three cases one predisposing factor may be the small size of the undeveloped rumen-reticulum in lambs before weaning, coupled with infrequent feeding of large amounts of milk in bottle-fed lambs.

## Cellulose

Feeding systems that allow lambs to drink large quantities of warm milk replacer at infrequent intervals may also predispose them to bloat. Ad-lib feeding of cold milk replacers, with few or no insoluble ingredients and adequately refrigerated, results in little or no bloating.

Lambs provided with feed containing cellulose feed may also be at risk. If these feeds pass quickly through the intestines they will increase the size of the large intestines and may lead to displacement. Intestines may then become twisted (torsion) and result in death.

Attention to hygiene is key, including the lamb environment (clean dry bedding), clean drinking water and any equipment used. Using individual bottles to feed lambs and scrupulous cleaning and disinfection helps to limit milk feeder contamination. In some instances, a change in milk replacer should be considered.

Adequate colostrum intake, both in quantity and quality, from vaccinated ewes is also vital to provide lambs with protective antibodies for infectious diseases.



By Amanda Carson, APHA



# Top tips for ATV maintenance and safety

Sheep farmers rely on ATVs to complete everyday tasks, but these vital machines do not always receive the correct level of maintenance and care they require.

"This can lead to operational failures that, in some instances, can be life threatening," says Yamaha's Gary Marshall.

Farmers can save time and money by making simple checks to help avoid costly downtime and reduce operator risk. "ATVs are relatively simple machines that can be easily maintained by farmers," he adds. "A regular service at a local dealer, as well as a watchful eye before and after a day's use, can make all the difference."

## Checklist

He has five top tips for farmers wanting to keep their ATVs in good working order – and safe to operate, which include checking oil levels, coolant, brakes and tyre pressure.

"There is no excuse for not checking oil levels on any vehicle," he says. "Most ATVs use a single cylinder engine, which works hard during a typical day on the farm. Towing heavy trailers, and the steep terrain that some farmers traverse, puts stress on the engine and can lead to higher-than-expected oil usage.

"So checking the oil level through a sight glass or using the dipstick once a week is essential

and an easy job that can help to identify excess oil consumption. By spotting potential problems early, farmers can avoid bigger issues, such as engine failure," he adds.

Final gear and differential oil should also be checked. There are two differentials – front and rear – on ATVs and the oil reserves are crucial to making sure each works correctly. Mr Marshall says: "While differential and final gear oil cannot be checked like engine oil level, it is easy to see if there are any leaks – find a flat area to park the ATV overnight and always return it to the same spot.

## Coolant

"This way any leaks from the differential or transmission can be identified by pulling away and getting off to check the parking spot for leaked oil on the ground. If a seal has failed it can be easily and cheaply replaced – preferable to the transmission or differential failing and causing costly damage."

Preventing the engine from overheating can be managed, even in hot weather, if the coolant levels are correct and regularly monitored. Mr Marshall recommends checking coolant levels, as sudden changes could signify a leak. He says: "Mostly ATVs will have a means of checking the coolant level visually but, similar to oil, a leak can be spotted by parking the ATV on a flat spot overnight and pulling away to investigate for any leakages."

Testing the brakes before using an ATV is vital to safety. Hydraulically-operated brakes can

become soft or spongy. "If this happens the brakes may need bleeding and it is best to ask a local dealer to do this. If brakes are noisy this could be a sign they may not operate correctly, and a daily visual check is often all that's required to identify stones or foreign objects, which could compromise brake efficiency," he says.

"Brake-cable lubrication and checking for any hydraulic leaks should also be carried out regularly, particularly if the ATV is being used in tough conditions."

Tyres are the only part of the ATV that is in contact with the ground, so check them too. "Tread levels and pressures are crucial to ensure the ATV will handle safely. The surface the ATV is being used on will dictate the correct tyre pressure, with lower pressures being better for soft ground and higher pressures helping the ATV to handle more accurately on the road. But always stay within the manufacturer's recommendations," adds Mr Mitchell.

## ATV safety checklist

- Engine oil
- Final gear and differential oil
- Coolant
- Brakes
- Tyre pressure

Figure 2: Intestinal torsion in an eight-week-old lamb.



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# Put safety first and save lives

By Brian Rees, guest contributor

During the past 20 years industries, such as construction, have greatly improved their safety record. This cannot be said for farming.

Workers are now six times more likely to be killed on a farm than on a building site. Tragically, on average, 33 fatalities occur on British farms each year – this horrific statistic needs to be addressed. Many more farmers and farm workers have suffered life-changing injuries or ill-health. A staggering 39 farmers were killed in 2020, showing an increase of nearly 20% compared to previous years.

Although farm inspections by the HSE (Health and Safety Executive) haven't been widespread of late, farmers have had plenty of opportunity to gain knowledge and receive practical guidance

on health and safety, allowing them to improve safety standards.

For example, HSE/Lantra Safety and Health Awareness Days provided the opportunity for up to 300 farmers to attend a half-day session to help them improve their knowledge. But farmer uptake of this and other schemes is poor, with 20% being the average response to many events. And few farmers who attend take any practical action when they return to their own farms.

## Hazard

I've been involved in health and safety and practical training for 35 years and have come to the conclusion the majority of farmers, possibly as much as 70%, consider health and safety to be another example of government red tape. Or health and safety doesn't apply to them. Or accidents happen to someone else.

I am now convinced that many people in our industry believe that killing close to 40 people per year is acceptable, and we should just put it down as an occupational hazard.

During the past 20 years I've been involved in fatal accident investigations for the HSE. I've visited scenes of accidents and met the employers, employees or family members involved. All experienced a huge amount of stress and trauma. For example, after a young man had been crushed and killed by a runaway tractor, I sat across a kitchen table from his 50-year-old father, who sobbed and asked: 'Why didn't we fix those brakes?' That experience will stay with me for a long time.

None of the people affected by accidents who I have met thought it would ever happen to them. *Brian Rees is an independent farm safety trainer and consultant. He recently won a lifetime achievement award for raising awareness of farm safety in Wales.*

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# Following the flock

We visit Cumbria, County Antrim and Warwickshire to catch up with NSA officeholders.

## Thomas Carrick

NSA Northern Region Chairman, Cumbria



After a really tough and trying spring, with a miserably cold May setting things back, it's amazing to see the meadows now full of healthy crops.

Livestock is starting to look a little more like what it should at this time of year. Of course good prices keep everyone's minds off the extra expense of spring and conditions look positive going forward. Here's hoping prime lamb trade can continue until the autumn breeding sales.

The sheep are looking great, probably due in no small part to them being fed for considerably longer than usual. But when faced with fields of hungry ewes and lambs, when there's usually grass in front of them, we had little option but to feed harder and longer.

We've managed to keep ahead of foot health problems, which certainly helps with the first impressions when checking stock. But, inevitably, it also helps flock performance.

With scald-related issues usually causing us problems at this time of year, when we are otherwise distracted cutting grass, we took the plunge and installed a concrete area for foot bathing to try to keep ahead of the game. Superstition should prevent me from making any major claims. But when time, energy and expensive drugs are considered, it's safe to say it has been a worthwhile investment.



## Jonathan Farmer

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chairman, County Antrim



Following a cold spring temperatures have been warmer than ever and, if anything, too dry at times.

It has caused grass to shoot up rapidly, resulting in quite a bit of topping. The dry conditions have allowed us to carry out weed control and drainage work in areas of the farm that would have been too wet in other years. Lambs are thriving and are just about to receive their second clostridial vaccine and wormer.

Unusually we have a lot of lambs indoors for this time of year, as we have reared all our pet lambs artificially with no cross-fostering at all. Hopefully these lambs will have gone to market by the time you read this.

We sheared about three weeks later than usual. The rise in the wool was better and shearing was much easier. If we don't get rain soon we may also be weaning slightly earlier to preferentially graze lambs. I'll measure farm cover and make an assessment.

I had hoped to reseed some leys to wean lambs onto, but it hasn't happened as quickly as planned. But with the lack of moisture that's no bad thing. Many lambs were finished on a grass Tyfon mix in 2020. This worked well and we hope to get as much of this mix in the ground as possible. Coupled with silage aftermaths, this will be our highest quality forage to finish prime lambs and grow our ewe lambs to reach target mating weights.

## Antony Spencer

NSA Marches Chairman, Warwickshire

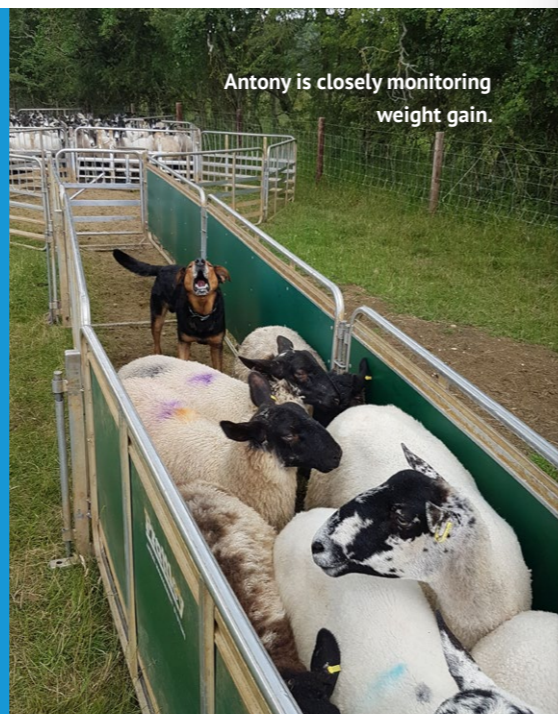


The lambs are doing nicely just on the grass and we have had a couple of draws already, which averaged 20kg deadweight.

We aim to weigh lambs every week and are closely monitoring weight gain. This allows us to target drench lambs in each group that are not putting the expected level of weight. This is the fifth season we have wormed lambs this way and it works well on our farm – and saves on product costs.

Everything was weaned by the end of July and then split into similar weight bands and dosed with a mineral drench, before going off to graze clean haymaking aftermaths. There is usually a little group of the smallest lambs, which contains 'persistent offenders' from the target worming programme. These will also get a wormer treatment after weaning.

The ewe lambs are typically weaned slightly earlier, so they have time to regain condition before they're sold at the end of August, and they have grown really well this year. As always at this stage in the sheep farming calendar, there is a lot of speculation about what the breeding trade will be like this year. I do hope they're not too expensive and find an acceptable level where everyone can make a living. A well-respected sheep farmer told me a replacement should cost you one and three quarter finished lambs, so let's see what happens.



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