

SHEEP FARMER

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2021

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



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1. Clements *et al* (2014). *Veterinary Record* 10.1136/vr.102161

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Is life black and white – or green?

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Life is rarely black and white. Take sheep prices – are they really high or just where they need to be?

I'd argue the latter, particularly for farmers seeing their Basic Payment in decline. But to what extent will the alarming increase in costs for most inputs and materials erode the hope of increased profitability of our sheep enterprises?

Are our good market conditions a freak of circumstances or have they been achieved by effort? Again, the answer is not black and white. We are undoubtedly benefitting from global supply and demand dynamics that are in our favour. But the past 12 months have seen an unprecedented increase in domestic promotion and advertising, which was well planned to avoid the potential disruption of Brexit.

We were lucky that Covid-19 pushed our food purchases from hospitality to the retail chain, exposing the hospitality supply chain as not being as loyal to British lamb as the supermarkets. But major retailers have not adopted their current loyalty to British lamb due to a sense of philanthropy.

Marketing

In reality we are benefitting both from a fortunate set of circumstances and a number of actions that have been taken – and that we should learn from for the future. In particular, despite having been told for years that marketing and advertising doesn't work, we have seen it does. And done well through campaigns such as Eating Better, we are blending shorter-term advertising with longer-term education.

On farm we also saw how beneficial it is to keep lambs coming forward, in spec, and clearing the way for more to follow. And we have definitely learnt that more work needs to be done with the hospitality sector – not only to apply pressure on them to source British, but also to help them benefit from quality local products with provenance.

Investing in our domestic market could be crucial to overcome the challenges thrown at us by the Government and the Department of

International Trade through its Australian and New Zealand trade deals. In terms of lessons learnt (are they ever learnt?) there is now an uphill battle to try to limit the impact of the quotas outlined in the Agreement in Principle.

Also not black and white are measures to combat climate change, and even less so are true measures of sustainability. But with COP26 taking place in Glasgow imminently we have recognised its importance by devoting five pages of this magazine to the topic.

Scrutiny

If sheep trade is of the greatest 'everyday' importance to our industry, climate change and environmental policy needs to be at the forefront of all of our minds. Decisions made now will have a lasting and long-term effect on most of what we do, and it will also impact trade in the longer term.

We can expect livestock and red meat production to come under intense scrutiny during COP26, which is why NSA started its 'Countdown to COP' at the start of September. We've been working hard to raise awareness that, while climate issues are paramount, we also need to look at sustainability in a more holistic way.

We may be on the verge of GWP* being accepted by climate scientists, where the short life cycle of methane is taken into account, and if so this will improve our position immeasurably. But take it from me, pressure on livestock farming won't come to an end even then.

The next suggestion will be that reducing livestock numbers will be a faster way to cool the climate. There is little appetite to stop the many real polluting activities the UK's economy benefits from, rather a willingness to give them time to become more greener. So what we will face again is the idea that ruminant farming should be sacrificed for the greater good. It sounds like recent trade deals all over again, with a failure to see how central sheep are to so many things.

So we have to speak up, with conviction about the inherent sustainability of sheep farming, but also with humility and acceptance that we can be part of the solution and that, however good we are, we can always do better.



INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER
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Annual report and accounts presented

A hybrid meeting allowed members to meet face-to-face and virtually for the NSA AGM in August.

The meeting was chaired by NSA President Lord Inglewood with presentations from Chairman Dan Phipps, Treasurer Dave Gregory (who was re-elected to the position) and several staff members.

In addition to the formal business, an NSA weathervane (pictured) was presented to past NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths, and his wife Liz, as a token of thanks for three years' service to NSA. As the most recent addition to the ranks of NSA Vice Presidents, Bryan has agreed to bring together that group twice a year to discuss and inform NSA activity. *Find the NSA Annual Report and Accounts at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about/nsa-governance.*



Children's poster competition

As part of its continued work to highlight the serious and devastating issue of sheep worrying by dogs, NSA is excited to launch a children's competition to help raise awareness to dog walkers and others enjoying the countryside.

NSA is challenging children in three age groups – under eight, eight to 12, and 13 to 16 – to design a new sign that asks dog walkers to keep their pet on a lead when walking in areas where sheep may be present. To assist with this, NSA has produced a downloadable template for children to use for their design, either through drawing and colouring by hand or by using their IT design skills.

The three winning designers will receive some Halloween goodies and have their sign made into a downloadable resource for farmers. *For more information and to download the template visit go.nationalsheep.org.uk/designsign.*



First ever NSA intern

NSA was delighted to welcome an intern to the team this summer – the first time NSA has been able to offer such an opportunity.

Funding from Reading University allowed NSA to welcome geography degree graduate Matthew Blackadder for a four-week placement. He proved a fantastic asset, updating and creating new NSA information, mainly to support NSA's 'Countdown to COP' communications work, before returning to Reading to begin a Masters in rural land and business management. *More about COP26 on pages 16-20.*



Vaccine advice

NSA apologises for the advice in the last edition of the magazine to use a louping ill vaccine, given that the product is not currently available (*Timely focus on ram health and condition – Aug/Sep 2021*).

Moreduin has two excellent publications about managing tickborne diseases in the absence of a vaccine. Go to www.moreduin.org.uk/research/diseases or, because all NSA members are automatically associate members of Moreduin, log into the member portal and find Newsheet vol. 6 no. 17.

On the topic of vaccines, Moreduin recently announced plans to bring a new enzootic abortion vaccine to market. NSA wishes Moreduin well in this ongoing work – and, in the meantime, reminds members vaccines are already available to protect sheep from chlamydial abortion. Speak to your vet or adviser.



Time to place your lambing adverts

The NSA Lambing List is open for members to place adverts for lambing placement students for the 2021/2022 season.

Access the service at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or call NSA Head Office. Guidelines and advice to write an attractive advert are also available.

Once the list is populated with a range of lambing adverts, in early November, it will open to agricultural and veterinary students seeking a work experience placement.

NSA Eastern Region set date for meeting

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Eastern Region will be held on Thursday 11th November, starting at 6pm, at Heath Court Hotel, Moulton Road, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 8DY.

The meeting is open to members and non-members, although only members can vote. Members not able to attend can appoint a proxy by downloading a form online. *More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.*

Recommend a friend for a chance to win

With two prizes still to be awarded in NSA and Solway Recycling membership prize giveaway this year, members are reminded they can still be in with the chance of winning by recommending a friend, neighbour or family member to join NSA.

So far lucky winners have received deluxe lambing pens, lamb-warming boxes and lamb adopters supplied by Solway Recycling, which manufactures a wide variety of products made from 100% recycled agricultural plastic. *The giveaway runs to mid-February 2022. Details at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.*

NSA regional reports



Matthew Fearon took first place in NSA Northern Region's Next Generation competition.

NSA Northern Region

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

In August we welcomed skilled and enthusiastic young sheep farmers to NSA Northern Region's Next Generation Shepherd competition.

The event, which was hosted by Daniel and Jackie Taylforth on their farm at Renwick, Cumbria, saw competitors take part in tasks such as sheep husbandry and welfare, stock judging, lamb selection, ATV handling and sheepdog handling.

The judges commented on the high level of knowledge shown by all competitors in the various tasks. William Harrison from Staveley won the under-18s novice class. Matthew Fearon of Keswick came back to defend his title, winning the over-18s class and lifting the trophy for the second time. Well done to all those who took part. Matthew will be joined by Thomas Watson, who was second place in the intermediate class, to represent Northern Region in the national final next year.

Thanks to all who helped to judge and steward on the day. Thanks also to Carrs Billington for sponsoring both the cash prize money to the tune of £1,000 and supplying the ATV.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Secretary

The NSA Marches Region committee is looking forward to welcoming members to an interesting farm walk on Tuesday 12th October, kindly hosted by beef and sheep farmer Rich Thomas of Risbury Court, Leominster, Herefordshire.

Rich will give a talk on his approach moving towards a low input and more extensive system to ensure the farm's future profitability. He will also give visitors a tour of his enterprise, which runs 350 Romney cross ewes and 50 pedigree Hereford cattle.

The region is also hoping to hold an in-person winter meeting, welcoming industry experts to speak at the NSA Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire. Members residing in the region are encouraged to check NSA's website for more information in the next few weeks.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

All on the NSA South East Region Committee are looking forward to welcoming members and other interested parties to its Sheep Health, Wealth and Production online conference, running for three evenings from Tuesday 26th October. *More on page 6.*

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

Starting a busy period of activity, NSA Cymru/Wales Region hosted its NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition day at the end of August with Tomos Glyn Davies crowned the overall winner, once again, following his victory at Glynliffon College in 2019.

After Covid-19 prevented the in-person finals of the competition in 2020 it will be good for Tomos to finally be able to compete at a national final, to be held in July 2022. Congratulations to Tomos and all the other competitors who did so well. Thanks also go to all who made the day successful, particularly competition sponsors the Texel Sheep Society.

In September more than 50 members, friends and neighbours joined a farm walk hosted by Jeff Gwillim and family at Cwm Farm, adjoining the Black Mountains, south of Talgarth, near Brecon in mid-Wales.

Attendees enjoyed viewing the farm's 300 acres with ground lying at 600-1,200ft and grazing rights on the Black Mountains running to 2,500ft. There was much discussion among the group about the importance of graziers, like Jeff, in the management of the hill. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker spoke about his and the Gwillim family's involvement in the Black Mountains Land Use Partnership (BMLUP), which has been responsible for much work in the area to improve the Black Mountains environment to the benefit of local graziers and the wider community. Thanks go to Jeff and his family for welcoming the large group and providing such an interesting and enjoyable afternoon.

The region is pleased to hear the Welsh Winter Fair is set to go ahead on Monday 29th and Tuesday 30th November. The region plans to have a stand and to sponsor some of the competitions.



Tomos Glyn Davies with his NSA Next Generation award.

NSA Eastern Region

The region was thrilled to join the Seabrook Family for a walk around National Trust's Ickworth Park, Suffolk, in September.

Guided by Paul Seabrook the visiting group of members and friends was able to observe the farm's environmental objectives working with a large flock of sheep on an historical estate.

NSA Eastern Region also enjoyed welcoming keen young sheep farmers to its NSA Next Generation Shepherd's day, held alongside NSA Central Region at Chatsworth Estate, Derbyshire. The standard of competition was high with Cameron Farnon taking first prize for the region. Congratulations to Cameron.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Secretary

As you read this we will have just held a joint farm walk with FWAG South West at Lovaton Farm, Okehampton, Devon, courtesy of Jane Barber and Simon Kemp. We look forward to reporting on this.

Bad weather led to the cancellation of our Next Generation Shepherd competition in October, but we plan to rearrange in the late spring.

Our committee is made up of a variety of farmers from across the region representing all types of sheep enterprise. During the past 18 months the committee has continued to meet regularly via Zoom and, as always, there is lively discussion around the various topics affecting us all. These include changes to the Red Tractor standards, the recent shake up at AHDB, developments with ELMS, and emerging issues surrounding Covid-19 and Brexit.

These discussions help distil the region's views and ideas and feed them into NSA's broader work. So it is vital we engage, wherever possible, with the wider regional membership. We've taken the opportunity presented to us by the wider 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.

If there are any topics or issues you'd like raised, or people or organisations you think it would be useful to engage with, feel free to contact me. *Contact details for all regional officeholders on page 2.*

NSA Scottish Region

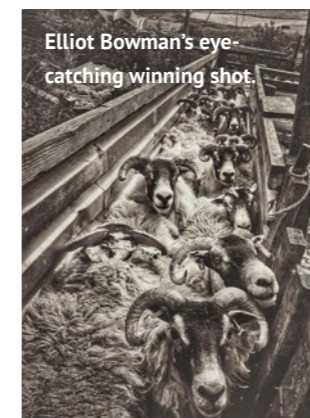
By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

NSA Scottish Region ran a successful photography competition at the start of September, to coincide with Love Lamb Week.

There were a large number of entries in five different categories and our congratulations go to the overall winners: Elliot Bowman, in first place; Kenneth MacLean, in second place; and joint third-place winners Jane Macdonald and Emily Duncan. NSA Scottish Region would like to thank all who supported the competition.

As we near St Andrew's Day at the end of November, NSA Scottish Region is urging Scottish members to consider 'banking a lamb' to help tell the positive story of sheep farming and promote eating lamb for St Andrew's Day. Following the success of 2020's project, which saw 1.2 tonnes of lamb delivered into schools, the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS) has created a Lamb Bank to give even more children the opportunity to taste, eat and cook with Scotch Lamb on the patron saint's day on Tuesday 30th November. Members selling sheep via an IAAS mart can donate the funds from the sale of one or more sheep into the Lamb Bank, which will be used to supply Scottish schools during the week of November 30th.

The next NSA Scottish Region committee meeting is scheduled to be held in mid-November.



Elliot Bowman's eye-catching winning shot.



NSA Next Generation competition winners Archie Roberts (Central Region) and Cameron Farnon (Eastern Region).

NSA Central Region

By Rose Smyth, Secretary

NSA Central Region combined with NSA Eastern Region to jointly hold its NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition at the end of September, at Chatsworth Estate in Derbyshire.

Welcoming enthusiastic young sheep farmers from across both regions, the standard of competition was high with Archie Roberts emerging as the deserving winner for NSA Central Region. He will now go forward to represent the region at the national finals.

It is with great sadness I am leaving my role as Central Region Secretary at the end of September. I have loved being a part of NSA's team and enjoyed my time as secretary, but due to a change of circumstances it is time to pass the role to someone else.

Alice Heliwell will take on the role from October. She may be familiar to several members because she works for Bagshaws Livestock Auctioneers, as well as helping manage her family's sheep and beef farm.

NSA is an amazing organisation and my role gave me an in-depth perspective of how hard the team at head office work and the amazing job they do. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity of being secretary and value all the support given to me during this time.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

Having been awarded an Associate Membership of the Royal Agricultural Societies (ARAgS) several years ago for his contribution to the sheep industry, NSA Northern Ireland Development Officer Edward Adamson was pleased to have this award upgraded to a fellowship, presented by HRH Prince Edward at Balmoral Show in September.

A fellowship (FRAGS) is the highest award given by the Council for Awards of the Royal Agricultural Societies (CARAS), which acts on behalf of the UK's four national Royal Agricultural Societies. The awards recognise personal achievement in a professional capacity and recipients are frequently individuals of influence within agriculture. They range from practical farmers to academics, company directors, media practitioners, administrators, advisors and consultants. All at NSA congratulate Edward on receiving this very well deserved honour.



Edward Adamson (left) with Prince Edward.

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

Top speakers to lead discussion at SHWAP event

NSA South East Region is looking forward to holding its fourth Sheep Health, Wealth & Production (SHWAP) Conference, which will be a virtual event this October.

Following the success of the previous conferences, the 2021 event will take place online in the form of a series of webinars on three consecutive evenings, starting on Tuesday 26th October and running until Thursday 28th October.

Well-known industry experts including Flock Health's Dr Fiona Lovatt, Professor Tommy Boland from University College Dublin, and Peter Lord from Dyson Farming, will be the headline speakers for each of the evenings, which will promote discussion and provide attendees with the opportunity to engage in a useful Q&A session with industry experts.



Fiona Lovatt.



Tommy Boland.

NSA South East Chairman Yann Le Du says: "While NSA South East Region is disappointed not to be able to welcome attendees in person, with the opportunity to enjoy the usual post-conference meal, we hope the virtual format will allow a wider, and international, audience to join us for what we expect to be three interesting and engaging evenings. We thank all the speakers who will be joining us, as well as the generous sponsors of this year's conference."

Members and other interested parties can register to join the conference at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/shwap. The SHWAP 2021 conference is kindly sponsored by DataMars, Elanco, MSD Animal Health and Rappa – and also, on Wednesday 27th October, by Germinal.

SHWAP

SHEEP, HEALTH, WEALTH AND PRODUCTION CONFERENCE
NSA South East Region

Tuesday 27th October

Health Planning

Yann Le Du, NSA; Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health; Fiona Kenyon, Moredun; and Eleanor Sanger, Yellow Wellies.

NSA will be joined by an impressive line-up of sheep health experts discussing methods to optimise flock health and the use of technology and tools in sustainable, healthy sheep production. The evening will also welcome 'Yellow Wellies' to talk about its important work to encouraging good human health and wellbeing.

Wednesday 28th October

Managing mixed swards in arable rotations

Tommy Boland, University College Dublin; Ian Metson, Essex-based sheep and arable farmer; and Becky Wilson, Farm Carbon Toolkit.

The benefits of introducing sheep into arable rotations will be discussed and delegates will hear from farmers and industry experts about the gains and challenges of using multi-species swards in sheep production systems. There's been renewed interest in this area, alongside the use of herbal leys, in recent years due to their role in building soil health and aiding carbon sequestration.

Thursday 29th October

Attracting, retaining and supporting the next generation

Peter Lord, Dyson Farming; Tom Goatman, British Grassland Society; and Katie James, NSA Next Generation Coordinator.

A range of speakers will discuss opportunities for inspiring and supporting the next generation of sheep farmers. With several ambassador and mentoring programmes available to keen young shepherds, attendees will hear from those involved in the delivery of these and from young sheep farmers who have benefitted from involvement in training and development.

NSA Breakfast Clubs building environmental awareness



Recent NSA Breakfast Clubs have focussed on sharing the importance of sheep farming as the world aims to slow climate change. It's a theme of increasing interest to the sheep sector, attracting the largest audiences to date, with farmers sharing their own experiences of working with the environment.

'Shabby is the new chic' described how finding the right balance between biodiversity and productivity on farm is essential to sustain thriving habitats, and support and protect nature. Production is not compromised, but enhanced by the nature-farming synergy that consumers increasingly value.

The importance of community was the focus of October's 'Forgotten faces' webinar, which recognised the threat to rural life and highlighted sheep farming's role to society and wider sustainability.

Rural communities have cultural and historical value, as well as providing employment and career opportunities, social infrastructure, education, social enterprise and the protection of nature. Speakers discussed this during the webinar, emphasising why this topic must not be excluded from the climate debate. Watch again at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

Sign up now for Sheep Breeders Roundtable

A free-to-attend, online format means the biennial Sheep Breeders Roundtable (SBRT) is more accessible this year than ever before. NSA has been an active part of the organising committee to bring together six excellent webinars over a five-day period from Monday 15th November.

NSA, Signet and the four UK levy bodies will each lead a session with speakers including a variety of industry experts, sheep breeders and international guests. The online conference will lay the foundations for the event returning to its face-to-face format in November 2022. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrr.



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Ram sale reports

New sale record at NSA South West Ram Sale

A successful 2021 NSA South West Ram Sale in mid-August saw a new record price with Robin and Emma Irwin, Umberleigh, Devon, selling their super Suffolk ram lamb for 4,200gns.

Telephone and online bidding through the MartEye facility allowed for plenty of interest from across the country for the top price ram, with the Irwin's young male ultimately selling to R.H. Black hundreds of miles away in Fife.

A flying trade for Texel males and females saw a high of 1,450gns and a breed average for shearing rams up £218 compared to 2020. Phil and Lesley Martyn's 10-strong Uglow flock consignment achieved the top price and averaged £918 for 10 sold. E.W. Quick and Sons, Crediton, Devon, sold to 1,400gns and averaged £1,001 for 14 rams. The female and overall champion Texel, a shearing ewe from Ben Roberts, Thorverton, Devon, also made 1,400gns.

In addition to the Irwin's ram lamb taking top price of the day for the Suffolks, and also a record price for Exeter Livestock Centre, many Suffolk vendors enjoyed a tremendous sale. Shearlings saw a top price of 1,400gns, from E.W. Quick and Sons and Nicky Hartwright. H.C. Derryman and Sons, Honiton, Devon, topped at 1,220gns. And 56 shearing Suffolk rams averaged £759.

There was a large number of Beltex sheep forward, with the females enjoying a good trade, topping at 650gns for a shearing ewe from Colin Roots of Southam, Warwickshire. There was a selective trade for the shearing rams to a top of 650gns, for Louise Elworthy of Exeter, Devon.

Society sale

This was an official sale for the Roussin Society with shearing ewes to 300gns for Sue Martyn, Launceston, Cornwall, and again for David Prouse, Holsworthy, Devon. Shearing rams also sold to 300gns for Sue Martyn and twice for Anthony Carter, of Dawlish Warren in Devon.

There was a large entry of Lleyns and the long journey for the Jones family from Machynlleth, Powys, was rewarded with a top price of 900gns.

Keen interest in the Charollais for males and females saw Gerald Burrough, of Honiton, Devon, having won overall Charollais champion, sell two rams for 1,000gns. The highlight of the Charollais sale came with the reserve champion, a ram lamb from Laura Monk, Truro, Cornwall, when spirited bidding resulted in a sale of 2,000gns via MartEye.

Border Leicesters attracted keen bidding. Shearing ewes were forward for the first time for many years and topped at 650gns twice for Sue Martyn.



The sale and market record breaker.



The Heygates Perpetual Trophy presentation

NSA Eastern Region sales attracted quality lots

Rugby sale

Top-quality terminal sires attracted keen buyers at NSA Eastern Region's Rugby Ram Sale, held at Rugby Farmers Mart, Warwickshire, at the end of August.

The pre-sale show was judged by David Inman of Salters Hill Farm, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, who selected an impressive pen of Charollais from A.D. and R.M. Thomas of Model Farm in Kimcote, Leicestershire, as overall champion.

This set the tone for the sale, as although selling was keen for all breeds, it was the Charollais that dominated the day. A stylish shearing from Charles Sercombe of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, took the overall top price, selling at 760gns to W.W. and J.A. McCurdie, Warwickshire.

A good offering of crossbred rams from V. and J. Roots attracted attention, with a Charollais cross Beltex shearing fetching 700gns. A good selling day continued for the Roots family, also selling the top price Suffolk for 560gns to H. Eadon, Warwickshire.

Two Texels sold to 620gns, one from M. and L. Blakemore and Sons, Bedfordshire, and another from P. Weaver, Nottinghamshire.

Melton sale

Held as part of the Melton Midlands Sheep Fair, the mid-September NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale was an action-packed day at Melton Mowbray Market.

The judging duo of David Wadland, Daventry, Northamptonshire, and Andrew Geary, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, gave the top prize to Chris Timm of Pickering, North Yorkshire, for his pen of Charollais shearlings.

Early in the sale, Mr Timm sold his shearlings to 850gns, 800gns and 720gns. Charollais ram lambs followed with excellent lambs from Rugby-based Cecil and Janette Thomas selling to 460gns on two occasions.

The usual high standard of Suffolk stock from Hallam and Eggleston of Walton on the Wolds, Leicestershire, saw a monster Suffolk shearing selling to 900gns, with others selling to 880gns and 750gns.

Texels attracted a typically strong following with good stock consistently hitting 650-750gns. Phil Weaver of Newark, Nottinghamshire, topped this at 1,000gns for a Texel shearing.

Crossbred rams commanded a strong following with a Charollais cross Beltex shearing, once again from Chris Timm, selling for 1,010gns.

Record-breaking NSA Wales & Border Main Sale pushes turnover of £2m

It was a record-breaking day with a lively trade, a top price of 8,000gns, and a turnover of nearly £2m at the NSA Wales & Border Main Sale in late September.

Consignors and vendors were clearly glad to be back, following the sale's absence in 2020. The top price of 8,000gns helped set the highest-ever average price of £694.63, up from £510.45 in 2019. Just shy of 3,000 sheep were sold, representing 88% of sheep forward.

NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale Chairman Graham Jones was delighted, commenting: "The top end has been really fantastic, with a solid trade right through. It's exciting the North Country Cheviots had a big entry and sold well, with a new record price of 3,600gns. They virtually all sold out and two rams beat the breed record at Builth.

Top price

"It was particularly nice to welcome the Dutch Spotted to the sale for the first time. They had a solid clearance, highlighted with a 2,000gns top price for a ewe lamb."

The highest priced ram, a shearing Caereinion Dan Dare out of Granite Untouchable, was sold by regular Texel consignor, Cefin Pryce, for 8,000gns. He has been selling at Builth since 1993 and sold the top price 12,000gns ram some years ago.

Andrew Reed, from W. O. J. Reed based at Upper Scolton in Pembrokeshire, was delighted to have the second highest price Texel of the day, with 6,800gns for their Scolton Dynamo. The shearing is out of Canllefaes Big Boy, weighs 160kg and is one of triplets.

The Hexham & Northern Marts ring saw Michael James' Duhonw shearing sell for 6,500gns. He makes the trip from nearby Blaenuhond, near Maesmynis, every year and this year brought 20 tups.



Top-priced shearing Texel.

The Bluefaced Leicester ring saw a top price of 6,000gns for Scott and Claire Thomason's ram lamb, Piel View P3. He was one of three tups they brought from Walney Island, Cumbria, and out of a Cernyw tup, bought from Elfyn Owen in 2020.

Breed champion

A Maerdy Charollais, bred by Esmor Evans, made 3,500gns. He was the breed champion and was bought by the breed judge, Michael Alford, who had praised his 'big powerful carcass'.

A Blue Texel sold for 2,000gns, a Dutch Spotted ewe lamb for 2,000gns and a South Country Cheviot for 3,200gns.

There was a personal best from Carmarthen's John Griffiths, whose shearing Bluefaced Leicester sold for 2,400gns. One of two Badger Face Torddu shearlings from Lucy Levinge, Vowchurch, Herefordshire, sold for 1,120gns. A Lleyn shearing sold for 1,800gns and a Suffolk for 1,500gns.

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NSA North Sheep
Wednesday 7th June, Northumberland

NSA Sheep South West
Tuesday 20th June, Dorset

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland
July TBC, Co. Armagh



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International trade deals and export opportunities

By Sean Riches, NSA

Away from the media hype speculating what deals have been done, NSA is keeping fully abreast of how the Government is carrying out its post-Brexit promise to maximise international trade.

After the domestic market, which takes roughly two thirds of the UK's lamb production, the EU is still our largest and closest export market. But access is now more difficult than it was when the UK was part of the EU. NSA is convinced access to the EU market must be maintained, but it is as important to work on any market offering future potential for sheep meat and ovine genetic trade.

Some of these negotiations are now moving at an accelerated pace to fulfil ministerial ambitions, to demonstrate the UK's ability to act as an independent trading nation, and to move away from such heavy reliance on the EU. At the time of writing, text for the Australia deal is close to completion, talks have accelerated with New Zealand with a view to having an Agreement in Principle (AIP) in place in the very near future, and preparations for accessing the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) are ongoing.

Opportunities

While the US President has poured cold water on the immediate possibility of a UK-USA Free Trade Agreement (FTA), other possible avenues have been mentioned including the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which came into force a year ago. While USMCA may offer wider opportunities for the UK, NSA understands this would not be the way an agreement on lifting the Small Ruminants Rule would be reached.

The Prime Minister has announced the USA is lifting its decades-old ban on imports of British lamb, but we understand there are many steps required before this can happen. There has

been no indication of when the US may begin accepting British lamb and an official statement has not been made.

There have also been a number of consultations related to FTAs to which NSA has also responded. These related to Canada, Mexico and India. There has also been a request for input to help design the UK's trade preferences scheme for some 70 developing nations. While opportunities for sheep meat export to many of these nations are extremely limited, if not negligible, there may be potential opportunities for breeding animals and genetic materials in the future. So NSA has commented, where appropriate, to ensure the UK sheep sector's interests are clearly registered.

The progress of both the Australian FTA and the potential New Zealand AIP have raised concerns, repeatedly flagged up by NSA, that insufficient scrutiny has been given to the contents and their potential impact on British agriculture and food production. For the Australian deal, NSA understand discussions continue regarding, among other subjects, market access, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, and animal welfare. The reported aim is for the text to be completed soon to allow parliamentary review, with a target for signing this autumn and to enter into force in summer 2022. This has led to an increase in the speed of negotiations for the New Zealand FTA with the Kiwi government, having seen the Australian AIP, expecting similar inclusions in its draft deal.

Given the choice, NSA would not have selected Australia or New Zealand for signing FTAs, due to their significant red meat industries and export capability. NSA would have preferred markets where real opportunities exist for sheep meat, such as the Middle East. But the UK Government is focussing on national economic benefits and these two antipodean nations have been targeted, which is why NSA continues to press for adequate opportunities for the FTAs to be scrutinised by a Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC), as well

as Parliament, to allow the possibility of some safeguards to be considered.

The formation of a TAC was highlighted as being important in addressing concerns about the impact of trade agreements on agricultural standards when this issue was debated during the passage of the Agriculture Act 2020. An interim TAC was set up by the Government to advise on trade policies. This body made a number of recommendations in its report in March and the Government said it would respond to the report 'in due course', but is yet to do so.

Scrutinise

In mid-June, Liz Truss, then Secretary of State for International Trade, reiterated the Government's promise, saying the TAC would be 'up and running to fully scrutinise the Australia trade deal'. But, as Sheep Farmer went to press, it had still not been formally constituted. Through its involvement in a number of industry working groups, NSA will continue to support the call for the TAC to be in place and to be allowed sufficient time to review the Australian FTA, and further deals, as proposals start to surface.

With the current governmental ambitions on trade deals, NSA stresses the importance of balancing these with a strong focus on promoting British food and agriculture. So NSA welcomes measures introduced by the Government to boost British food and drink exports, announced in September. These include appointing more dedicated 'agri-food attachés', to unlock key global markets; establishing a Food and Drink Exports Council, to expand our exports strategy; and strengthening technical expertise, to help exporters benefit from market opportunities.

NSA maintains it is essential Britain opens as many viable trade opportunities as possible. In comparison with other exporting nations, the resources the UK has previously invested in senior trade development attachés has been woefully inadequate, so this news is very welcome and is something NSA has long called for.

Animal welfare top priority on policy and consultation agendas

As well as a number of consultations related to trade deals, there have also been other policy related subjects to which NSA has responded in recent months.

The UK Government and devolved administrations have made it abundantly clear how they want to lead the world in terms of the standards of animal welfare and now, being divorced from the EU, they are indicating the direction of travel and the areas on which they wish to focus. While these consultations have been separate and somewhat specific, NSA has highlighted how they are connected and so should not to be treated in isolation.

Members will recall the consultation on journey times and welfare in transport, which closed towards the end of February this year. The Government's response was published in August and will feed into its manifesto commitment through the Kept Animals Bill, currently progressing through Parliament, with a second reading imminent.

While the response was issued on behalf of the English and Welsh administrations, Defra indicated that very close liaison with their Scottish counterparts is planned to establish a consistent approach across Great Britain. The UK Government confirms, based on the consultation responses, it will proceed with a ban on the export of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats and pigs) and horses from England, Wales and Scotland for slaughter and fattening. This is likely to come into force sometime during 2022 and timings are yet to be decided.

Industry engagement

On a number of other points contained in the consultation, Defra has made some proposals but intends to consult with industry through 2021 and into 2022, before progressing further. NSA, with other livestock industry organisations, has called for meetings and workshops with Defra to be as an industry group, as opposed to single sector engagement. We will keep members informed as and when this progresses further.

Tail docking and castration in lambs is permitted in the UK, governed by multiple legislations. But the changing political and global agenda with reference to animal welfare means such procedures are increasingly under the spotlight. In response to the recent consultation from the Animal Welfare Committee Working Group, and following a number of internal workshops, NSA made it clear how sheep farmers already assess risks on farm and make decisions based on improving health, welfare and productivity.

NSA considers the use of suitable local anaesthetics and short-term pain relief, related to castration or tailing, improves the welfare in the longer term, but notes the current lack of licensed products. So is asking for a review of licensing and/or prescribing legislation to allow better access for farmers.



At the same time, NSA urges caution because any changes to current systems forced by restrictions could have unintended consequences and may make welfare and farm viability poorer. NSA also believes the most significant welfare gains in the sheep sector could instead be made through a range of measures to enhance disease and parasite control.

Wider review

Early in September Defra launched a consultation, with a deadline for responses of Monday 6th December, to identify possible improvements to food labelling and consumer information to deliver high welfare and environmental outcomes. This is a step alongside a wider review of food labelling for the Food Strategy White Paper, intended as a response to Henry Dimbleby's National Food Strategy. Defra is looking for evidence on the impact of different labelling, to inform any future policy proposals on labelling for animal welfare and on its effectiveness at influencing farmer, business and consumer behaviour.

This is a call for evidence relating to England, Wales and Northern Ireland only, as animal welfare and food labelling are devolved. Defra will be discussing the responses with Scottish Government in due course. NSA will be preparing a response by gathering input from its various committees and officers, and will keep members informed.

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Scotland's power sharing agreement reveals aims for agriculture

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



For the first time Scotland has a power sharing agreement, signed at Holyrood, between the SNP and the Scottish Green Party.

In their draft shared policy programme, the main aim for agriculture states: 'Scotland should be a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture... to support and deliver nature restoration and a just transition to net zero, and to produce high quality food.'

It is more important than ever for industry engagement with both parties to ensure a clear understanding of what is needed for a productive and sustainable Scottish agricultural sector. This includes the achievement of ambitious net zero targets set out the Government. There must be harmony between productivity, climate change mitigation and biodiversity improvement – but can this be accomplished?

Climate change

Government's programme for 2021/22 has signalled measures for new entrants, tenant farmers and smallholders in relation to climate change and mitigation, for women in agriculture, organic farming, and also considers options to see agricultural workers paid the living wage.

Members will be aware of the recently formed Agricultural Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB), which was established as part of the Government's 100-day manifesto commitment. By the time you read this,

that group will have already had its first meeting. We must have clear and independent thinking, which can deliver the fairness our farmers sorely need. The eyes of Scotland (at the very least) will be watching to see some demonstrable and effective answers to the position in which we find ourselves. And there is certainly no time to be lost – the clock is ticking.

First steps

A consultation has already been launched to determine the first steps towards agricultural transition in Scotland, which aims to build on the recommendations of the farmer-led groups that convened in early 2021. A newly-launched NSA Scottish Region Policy sub-committee will come together to discuss this consultation in depth to ensure the Scottish sheep sector's response is formed ahead of the closing date of Wednesday 17th November 2021. Should any member wish to raise any concerns, please get in touch with me (see page 2 for contact details).

The direction the Scottish Government will take on the FAWC Animal Welfare in Transit consultation remains unclear. Defra has now published its stance with further industry engagement to follow. As ever, Scotland will need to wait patiently for further information.

Remember, if you have applied to the Sustainable Agriculture Capital Grant Scheme, due to supply issues, an extension has been granted to Friday 31st December, to submit your claim.

Welsh Government consultation requires farmer feedback

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Complementing the COP26 conference being held in Glasgow in November, NSA Cymru/Wales Region will speak up for sheep farming at Welsh Government's COP Cymru event.

Details will be shared in the NSA Weekly Email Update nearer the time. We are particularly interested in the event taking place on Thursday 25th November, which relates to nature, adaptation and resilience safeguarding. This focuses on restoring natural habitats and ecosystems, to preserve biodiversity, and helping our communities adapt to the impact of climate change.

Livestock identification

Welsh Government is launching a consultation this autumn on changes to livestock identification, registration and movement, and we would appreciate your feedback or comments. Get in touch with me to feed into the NSA response (contact details on page 2) or submit your own response. The consultation will run until Sunday 2nd January 2022.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has taken part in several stakeholder meetings during the past few months related to wool, carcass classification and

welfare in transport. The August release of the Government response to the transport consultation informed industry of the plan to ban live exports for slaughter and also outlined how other proposals in the consultation – about temperature, headroom and journey times – will now be discussed in more detail with stakeholders.

More on the livestock ID consultation at www.gov.wales or by emailing adnaboddabyw.livestockid@gov.wales.



Livestock ID consultation has been launched.

Image: Shearwells Data Ltd.

Northern Ireland Protocol remains central to political concerns

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Things are getting busy again after a period of limited interaction between our regional group and local government over the summer months.

The group looking at sheep scab control are putting together a plan to manage and eventually eradicate scab and hope to proceed in the near future.

Those involved in the movement of sheep between Great Britain and Northern Ireland have become increasingly frustrated at the lack of action. This is not the fault of industry, as stakeholders (including NSA) have been continually pressing for a resolution to the barriers against movements. The problem seems to lie with politicians who are not directly affected and seem to see no reason to act immediately on the problems it is causing the livestock industry. With London and Brussels due to re-engage in September, the implications of the NI Protocol remain at the centre of political concern and contention.

Swiss model

Some Northern Ireland political parties and the European Commission itself, among others, have proposed a UK-EU agreement following the Swiss model. According to the EU, a Swiss-style veterinary agreement would remove 80% of SPS checks, as well as the administrative burdens on GB

traders selling goods into the EU. But it would require the UK to agree to align with EU law in these areas, coupled with the likely sign up to some form of EU oversight – a longstanding red line for the UK Government.

Lord Frost said the UK could not agree to alignment, as the UK needed control over its laws to make trade deals with other countries. But negotiating, ratifying and implementing new trade deals will take time and the UK could sign up to this on a temporary basis.



An urgent resolution to barriers against movements is required.

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Sheep worrying Q&A: 'If you don't report it, it hasn't happened'

By Sean Riches, NSA

During a year that's seen a significant increase in the incidence of sheep worrying, as well as the introduction of two parliamentary bills associated with responsible dog ownership, NSA has taken the opportunity to gain some guidance from an experienced and dedicated police officer.

PC David Allen from North Wales Police has several years of experience dealing with sheep worrying and sits on the Livestock Worrying Roundtable. Here he fields questions raised by NSA members, providing guidance and direction to farmers should they have the misfortune to suffer a dog attack.

Q. What should I do with a dog that is worrying sheep when no owner is present?

A. Personal safety must be the first concern but, if deemed safe, try to capture dog. If it is unsafe take pictures and videos, making sure to note markings and anything that helps to identify the dog. Certain distraction techniques can be used, such as shouting and waving arms, to stop the attack. If you are actually witnessing an attack it is imperative you report it immediately by calling 999. This is something that we cannot stress strongly enough – if you don't report it, it hasn't

happened. The attack is a crime, so report it. That applies for all cases. If the attack has stopped, or the dog is no longer present, report it via 101. If we have a record, we can build up an event log.

If the owner is known but not present, a direct approach – by the police or the farmer – may be best. Local police do have options, from a low-level discussion and warning, through to putting certain restrictions in place and taking formal action.

Q. How do I find out who my local rural crime officer is and how do I contact them directly?

A. Not every force has a rural crime team. Search online to find out if there is one. If there is, the site should provide the local contact details and the team should also be contactable online.

Q. Is there a body that collects all the data regarding sheep worrying incidents across the country - not just those reported to police?

A. Not currently, but the Home Office is being pushed to make this happen. At the moment it is run by police on a voluntary basis. The Kept Animals Bill, currently progressing through Parliament, means databases are under consideration that may enable some recording. Swabbing for DNA is part of the proposals under the bill. Academics are working on the best practice for collecting and storing DNA.

Q. Who is responsible for signage, highlighting where livestock are grazing, when a public right of way either crosses or passes your land?

A. It does depend on who the land-owner is. It is a civil issue. But the use of signs does help raise awareness. It is more of a decision for the stock-owner, rather than the land-owner, and signs can be taken down and put up whenever and wherever appropriate.

Q. Gathering all the information required for a successful prosecution appears to be a major stumbling block. How can farmers be sure they have all the information and evidence required?

A. In addition to the points raised above, record the registration plates and make of any cars in the vicinity, as well as the direction the dog or dogs have travelled after the attack, details on injured animals, and other damage to property (gates, fences and stiles) and make sure you have reported the attack.



Q. I recently had an attack. We caught the dog and so we found out who the owner was, so I was fully compensated. The police issued a press release, but wouldn't add a photo of our injured sheep. Why couldn't the photo be added, to shock people into controlling their dogs?

A. Every force has its own policy, so it is difficult to comment on particular cases. But there is evidence that shows the use of graphic and gory images does not work with the public. They tend to be dismiss such images as being over dramatic.

Q. What boxes need to be ticked, or what evidence is required, before I can shoot the dog?

A. The decision to shoot a dog is a personal choice and should always be considered as the last resort. Circumstances will dictate whether it is appropriate. The attack must be ongoing and you must be able to demonstrate that all has been done to stop the attack, before shooting the dog. If you do have to shoot it you must report it to the police within 48 hours – and preferably straight away. If the attack has finished the dog cannot be shot. If the dog is no longer in the same field as the livestock it cannot be shot. Also important to remember is if the dog is injured, and not killed, then it becomes your responsibility to ensure appropriate veterinary care is given.

PC Allen also points out how much of the new legislation progressing through Parliament has been formulated based on feedback from NSA members, and reiterated how important it is to continue to report all incidents. The new act is intended to strengthen the ability to deal with persistent offenders, to provide more power for the police to be able to act, and pursue cases to a satisfactory resolution.

NSA would like to thank all members who contributed questions and will, in due course, provide answers in full to all questions in the NSA Sheep Worrying section online.

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Essential messages shared as world spotlight falls on Glasgow



A landscape lacking lambs, a countryside without cows, and the loss of Britain's pastoral heritage would be the stark consequence of an inadequately analysed approach to managing climate change.

That is the focus of NSA's 'Countdown to COP' communications, ahead of representatives from more than 190 countries descending on Glasgow, in November, for the United Nations Climate Change Conference. With a global increase in urgency around climate change, and Covid-19 preventing 2020's annual conference of the parties (COP), there is perhaps more expectation around this summit than most years.

Contribution

Agriculture will be in the spotlight, alongside transport, industry, electricity/heat generation and other major emission contributors. But given the broad remit of the conference, the risk is that sweeping generalisations will be made about global agriculture with no consideration that UK farming, and the sheep sector particularly, is already making a positive contribution.

NSA is committed to ensuring sheep farming has a profile and started communications back in August, primarily aimed at policymakers and the general public, but also including NSA Breakfast Club topics for farmers and the wider sheep sector.

The theme of the communications, complemented by case studies of UK sheep farmers, is that a more holistic approach to sustainability is required if we are to meet environment, economic and social goals. Over-simplifying the debate by forcing through policies on changes to land use (in the belief it will reduce carbon emissions) will have adverse effects, including the erosion of rural communities and supermarket shelves stocked with imported meat produced to standards neither permitted or desired in the UK.

NSA is encouraging policymakers not to think of climate change or nature recovery in isolation, but to consider these things in tandem with the protection of natural resources, heritage, rural economies, the health and wellbeing of people, and sustainable and local food production.

And NSA is discouraging sweeping statements about global agriculture, instead emphasising the unique position of the UK sheep sector as a predominately grass-based system, and highlighting the often-overlooked difference between methane and carbon dioxide.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "The priority in NSA's COP communications has been the danger of over-simplifying the climate change debate and kneejerk reactions that do not look at the big picture. Politicians and the media want headline-grabbing targets, but that will not serve UK agriculture, the environment or society."

"No one should consider sheep farming as 'indulgent' but instead look deeply enough to understand that we are involved in maintaining probably the most stable and resilient plant habitats on earth – grassland – which has a vital role in carbon sequestration."

Balance

"UK sheep farmers are striking an important balance between sustainable food production and nature recovery/biodiversity, while providing vital public goods including landscape management and public access. And they are the linchpin of rural communities, which have a cultural and historical value and provide employment and career opportunities, social infrastructure, education, social enterprise, and the maintenance of traditional artisan methods."

"Sheep farming is part of the solution to climate, nature and human health problems and needs recognising as such."



Sheep have a role in climate change solution.

COP26 case studies

A key part of the NSA 'Countdown to COP' communication message is farmer case studies showcasing holistic approaches to sustainability.

John Pawsey

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk



For the past 20 years we have worked towards moving our mixed organic system towards one that is also a haven for plants and wildlife.

We manage a six-year rotation to build fertility and diversity on farm and reintroduced sheep as part of this. The enterprise has helped improve soil health, as well as bird and pollinator populations, and livestock is performing well.

We take great pride in the knowledge our holistic low-input system is carbon negative.

Sybil McPherson

Dalmally, Argyllshire



The land our family has farmed for 180 years is permanent pasture, almost entirely designated as rough grazing, without opportunity to improve. The farm has remained 'traditional' for these reasons and works in harmony with the environment around us.

We believe native breeds forage and utilise the poor quality grazing on our land far better than others, and enhance all environmental aspects without damage or over-grazing some areas or under-grazing others. A balance is crucial to benefit farmed animals and the wide variety of biodiversity that depends on the land use.

This type of farming story should be shared with the public, offering a more accurate picture of food production and its impact on the environment. The consumption of sustainably reared-lamb, which utilises vegetation from land unsuitable for cultivation, meets many desirable outcomes.

Will Rawling

Ennerdale, Cumbria



Fell farming works with nature and has created much of the landscape deemed worthy of protection. Grazing sheep in the fells of the Lake District is part of the solution to climate change and can assist with flood mitigation and enhance nature – an ambition of every farmer I know. We have done it for years. We are part of nature, we cannot ignore it or work against it, because the natural process will prevail.

The fells provide a livelihood for a few and inspiration for many. They provide a sense of place in an area that has changed little since the early settlements. The fells are valued by many people for many different reasons, but they are the way they are because of, not despite, farming.

Crosby Cleland

Ballynahinch, County Down



For many Northern Ireland-based sheep farmers working with smaller acreages, efficiency is key. But that does not mean that production cannot work in harmony with the environment also.

We introduced multi-species swards to benefit both the sheep and the soil, regularly reseeding and rotationally grazing stock to ensure carbon is dispersed as efficiently as possible.

Only rams with proven genetics are used and we utilise technology to carefully monitor stock performance and to ensure they are efficient and continually helping progress production on farm each year. Data has really helped us track our environmental impact and make adjustments accordingly.

Caryl Hughes

Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, North Wales



Sheep farming has been the backbone of the community here in the Ceiriog Valley for centuries, working in harmony with the environment.

Some traditions have been adapted and slightly modernised, but farms joining forces to help gather each other's mountain flocks and local farm events, such as the sheepdog trial and show, are still important to the area. The conversation around the table after the gather or in the village pub after the show will be mainly in Welsh – a language that's rarely heard in the village on any other occasion, due to an increasing number of people moving into the area.

If sheep farming ceased to exist in the area, community spirit and centuries-old traditions would be lost, and there's a danger the Welsh language would also disappear.

Join the conversation

- Read NSA's 'Countdown to COP' press releases at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news.
- Explore NSA's climate change position at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/uk-sheep-industry/sheep-and-the-environment.
- Join a future NSA Breakfast Club webinar or watch a previous one. The September, October and November sessions all have a COP theme. See page 6 or visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.
- Look out for messages on NSA's Facebook and Twitter accounts (and share content so it reaches an even wider audience).

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Livestock production has a role to play in mitigating climate change.

Can – and should – UK sheep farming contribute to net zero?



Net zero by 2050. Regardless of interim targets set by others, that's the ultimate cut-off, enshrined in law, by which the UK must not produce more greenhouse gas than it removes from the atmosphere.

The main goal of COP26 in Glasgow in November is to ensure all countries achieve such targets and keep the world within 1.5°C of warming. Agriculture will be one of many sectors being discussed. Not just because it produces emissions (something many UK farmers consider to be exaggerated), but also because grassland and non-cropped habitat such as hedgerows remove carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere (something that is often overlooked).

NSA has focused its 'Countdown to COP' efforts at promoting the already positive contribution of UK sheep farming to climate change mitigation, as well as highlighting sustainability as being more holistic than just reducing emissions.

But if we do consider emission targets on their own, what do they mean for UK sheep farmers? After all, we are just one sector of agriculture in a country



Ewe efficiency, not the size of the nation flock, is key.

that makes up less than 1% of global emissions.

Do we have a role? And if so, will it really make a difference?

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "UK sheep farmers are not going to solve global warming on their own, but the dangers are such that everyone needs to play their part. And it will do our reputation no harm to be seen to be doing what we can to mitigate the risks.

Carbon footprint

"I don't support any suggestions to reduce the national flock to 'cool' the climate. Sustainable food security is equally important and sheep production based on grass could hardly be more sustainable. But there are efficiency improvements that can reduce our carbon footprint to work towards net zero.

"The other way we can help is through sequestration – locking more carbon into on-farm organic materials. Increasing organic matter in soils to store more carbon also makes soils more biologically active and functional, and increasing hedgerow mass stores more carbon and provides shelter and shade for stock and opportunities for wildlife.

"Sheep farming as it stands now can be argued to be good for the planet in a number of ways, and grassland is still one of the most undervalued and multifunctional crops/habitats on earth. It is about fine tuning rather than change.

"But while there is plenty sheep farmers can do, action is also needed by policymakers to ensure a supportive and honest policy framework – one that recognises grassland in the same way trees are recognised. Integration of trees into farmland has a role, but mass afforestation is something else and policymakers need to be very cautious about taxation and offsetting policies that damage our pastoral base without really understanding the end result."

The UK leaving the EU Common Agricultural Policy combined with ambitious emissions targets means the bulk of the post-Basic Payment Scheme farm support budget will be targeted heavily in favour of the environment.

With detail on specific plans for all four UK nations not yet available, Defra's Janet Hughes says BPS will be replaced with initiatives to support

farmers to make the changes required to reduce emissions and increase CO₂ storage on their farm.

She says: "Many changes need not be large-scale. Livestock farmers can reduce agricultural emissions by, for example, developing flock health plans, using precision feeding techniques and introducing trees to pasture.

"By taking action to reduce emissions and store more carbon, sheep farmers will be making an important contribution. All farms, whatever their size, can make a positive impact to achieve net zero."

For UK ruminant agriculture, the issue is mostly around methane emissions – but because methane is a less long-lived greenhouse gas than CO₂ (see panel) it is argued a 10% reduction over 30 years is equivalent to methane net zero.

Ewe efficiency

Independent consultant Liz Genever agrees this is achievable through flock efficiencies rather than reducing stock numbers. She encourages sheep farmers to focus on fertility, ewe mature weight and lamb growth rates, as methane production is driven by feed intake, which in turn is driven by bodyweight (heavier animals eat more) and days on farm.

Dr Genever says: "Ewe efficiency is crucial. They should be rearing 65% of their bodyweight to the point of weaning – so a flock with 70kg ewes and rearing 1.7 lambs should be weaning lambs at 90 days at an average weight of 27kg (1.7 x 27 divided by 70).

"Ewes are typically getting bigger and some farmers are switching breeds to counteract this. But it comes back to the weight lambs need to be weaned at to justify the extra weight of the ewe. Weigh some of your own ewes to see where the flock average is and compare this with weaning weights.

"Lamb growth rates are also key and influenced by a range of factors – genetics, health and nutrition. The industry targets for lowland flocks are a group average of 20kg at eight weeks and 30kg at an adjusted 90 days of age. The aim is to achieve this with minimal feed use, using grass and forage.

"Fewer days on farm means lower emissions, but this needs to be balanced with feed inputs. Ruminants can utilise a range of feeds and forages, and strategic use of home-grown or bought-in feeds can be justified if it cost-effectively accelerates gain. But monitor eight-week and weaning weights against industry targets to ensure production is efficient."

Louise McNicol, a PhD student at Bangor University who is focused on identifying strategies for Welsh farm to achieve net zero, says research consistently shows what is possible.

"Strategies will vary and this isn't necessarily based on farm size or type, but revolves around efficiency. Optimising nutrition, grassland management, genetic merit and animal health could all reduce emissions," she says.

"Reducing the number of unproductive animals and achieving target weights faster, so stock is on farm for less time, will mean lower emissions of methane and nitrous oxide. It can also mean less land is required to maintain the current level of output, leaving more land available for offsetting strategies such as agroforestry. Given that some emissions are unavoidable, offsetting will play an important role.

Sustainability metrics

"Although UK agriculture contributes relatively little to emissions on a global scale, it still contributes significantly to the UK total. And with the net zero target legislated in the UK, doing nothing is not an option."

Looking ahead to COP26, Mr Stocker says: "Climate change and global sustainability is not a tide we can swim against, and neither should we want to because we hold some of the keys and know climate change and extreme weather conditions will make our lives far more difficult.

"NSA will continue to fight for carbon footprinting methods to be more accurate and meaningful, and to always consider wider sustainability metrics. In particular, we will push for the multifunctional role of grass to be better understood, the inclusion of whole food chains in footprinting tools,

and acceptance of the misleading way that methane and carbon equivalents are taken account of. We then need to strive to reduce our footprints through efficiency measures.

"Finally, we need incentives and reward for storing carbon on our farms, and where possible to consider renewable energy production on farms. These measures, along with tempering rampant enthusiasm for planting our grasslands with trees, would mean UK sheep farmers may not just find net zero achievable, but deliver on a more far-reaching assessment of sustainability."

Emission type varies between industries.



Carbon versus methane

NSA has made much of recent work by Oxford University to assess the warming impact of methane more accurately, arguing the newer approach (GWP*) is better because the existing method (GWP¹⁰⁰), does not recognise that methane, unlike CO₂ and nitrous oxide, is a short-lived greenhouse gas.

Around 85% of methane breaks down after 12 years and virtually all of it after 20 years. Therefore, taking an average of 28-times for ruminant methane emissions over 100 years, as happens now using GWP¹⁰⁰, is extremely misleading.

Richard Young, Sustainable Food Trust Policy Director, says GWP* shows a sheep flock maintaining stable numbers for 20 years has a 75% lower warming impact than we've been led to believe. However, this arguably puts more pressure on reducing methane emissions, as doing so will help cool the atmosphere, whereas it's harder to have a positive impact on the CO₂ already in the atmosphere, which will continue to warm the planet for thousands of years unless it is removed on a large scale by some means.

The other flipside, according to Mr Young, is that while GWP¹⁰⁰ overestimates the lifetime of methane, it underestimates its actual warming effect. GWP¹⁰⁰ calculates methane as 28 times carbon over 100 years, whereas GWP* puts it at 85 times carbon over 20 years.

He says: "This is what's behind a number of recent academic papers arguing we have to cut methane emissions dramatically, as this would help to keep us from exceeding 1.5°C of warming. The UN has called for all countries to cut their methane emissions and there is a USA-EU deal to cut methane emissions by 30% by 2030, which the UK has apparently indicated it will join."

While UK methane emissions have declined by almost 60% since 1990, official figures indicate agricultural methane emissions have only fallen by 13%, despite the significant reduction in livestock numbers in that time. The good news is the Oxford scientists behind GWP* believe for ruminant methane, a 10% reduction over 30 years is equivalent to net methane zero.

Mr Young says: "That should be achievable through breeding programmes. And if vaccines and feed additives can help us go further and faster, we should also obviously do that."

Navigating the minefield of farm sustainability assessments

By Matthew Blackadder, NSA



For anyone not already familiar with farm sustainability assessment tools, getting started can be a minefield – mainly because there is no single recognised tool to use.

That's why one of my challenges when I joined NSA for a four-week internship in August was to consider what tools are out there and if/how a sheep farmer might approach using them.

Unless pushed by a retailer to carry out carbon footprint calculations, not many sheep farmers will welcome filling in more paperwork. But coupled with the imminent COP26 conference, there has never been a greater focus on how society can become more sustainable and the roles individuals and businesses can play.

Holistic

NSA has repeatedly argued that sustainability has to be holistic, covering environment, economics and – so my challenge was to look for farm sustainability assessments that do more than just carbon.

This makes measurement difficult – but doesn't mean it should be avoided. All farm businesses can self-assess their current performance across a number of variables and use the results to plan for the future. Identifying changes suitable for your business can also improve efficiency and profitability – or help you take a more holistic approach if production is not the sole interest.

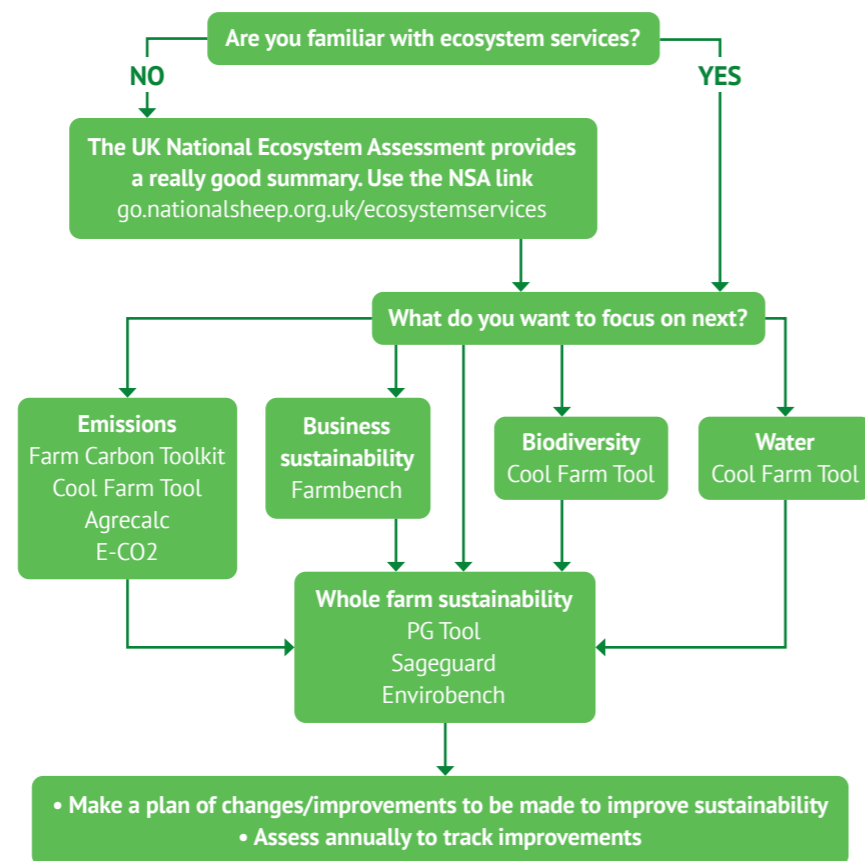
Whatever farm support replaces the Basic Payment Scheme will not be production driven, so understanding and accepting sustainability assessments now may make things easier in the long-term. And with free trade deals looking inevitable now we are no longer part of the EU, assessments are likely to become increasingly useful to validate and promote UK produce compared to imports.

Scope

Be they called carbon calculators, sustainability assessments or ecosystem service tools, there are several services out there. Using all of them is virtually impossible so it is best to choose one that provides a sufficient scope across your business.

Most are designed for individual farms to use themselves. Just take care when methane and nitrous oxide are expressed as carbon dioxide equivalents for ease of representation. This is misleading, and something NSA is campaigning to increase awareness of (see page 19).

New technology will be developed, so hopefully we'll reach a point where there is an accepted approach or one tool that clearly outperforms the rest. But that could be a way off yet and there are gains to be made by having a go now.



Sustainability assessment tool options

- **Farm Carbon Calculator.** Specific tool for calculating carbon emissions at whole-farm level. Free. Has additional toolkit for forward planning. See calculator.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk.
- **SustainFARM Public Goods Tool.** Broad-approach tool for more than just food production, developed by Organic Research Centre but not solely for organic farms. Free, but not easy to find online so use the NSA link go.nationalsheep.org.uk/ORCSustainFARMtool and then the link at the top of page three in the PDF.
- **Cool Farm Tool.** Separate tools for greenhouse gases, biodiversity and water. Free for up to five assessments. See coolfarmtool.org.
- **Farmbench, by AHDB.** Focuses on financial key performance indicators and allows benchmarking against other farms. Free. See ahdb.org.uk/farmbench.
- **Agrecalc.** Free carbon audit, benchmarking and performance indicators, with paid-for upgrade for more detailed tools. See www.agrecalc.com.
- **E-CO2.** Alternative to self-assessment method, as offers consultant visit to farm and full environmental assessment. See www.eco2uk.com.
- **Sageguard.** Developed by EU-funded iSAGE project, which NSA was involved in. Specific sheep tool. All aspects of sustainability. See sageguard.net.
- **Envirobench.** Under development by AHDB as environment add-on to Farmbench. Will focus on feed conversion efficiency.

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Overseas study for two NSA members



An EU-funded Turkish-led research project has provided the opportunity for two NSA members to travel overseas to find out more about organic livestock production.

NSA is part of the E-Organic Erasmus project to collate European information into a free-to-access online resource (including but not limited to sheep), and allow nominated individuals from the participating countries of Italy, Spain, Turkey and the UK to visit each other on study trips. NSA welcomed UK farmers to apply for the opportunity and Mike Adams and James MacCartney were the candidates selected through an interview process.

By coincidence, Mike and James farm just eight miles from each other in Rutland (NSA Central Region). Having previously not known each other, they arrived in Milan, Italy, in late September to spend five days visiting organic farms and learning more from the Humus Network of Italian organic cooperatives and organisations.

Mike is a first-generation farmer who established his own flock in 2005. After various breed experiments, he is moving towards Poll Dorsets lambing three times in two years, alongside similarly recently established beef and arable enterprises. He has just entered organic conversion.

Regenerative

James is not farming organically but shared Mike's interest in regenerative agriculture, particularly improving grazing management and

sward quality. He runs 600 breeding ewes and 150 cattle alongside various diversification schemes, with plans to increase sheep numbers as grazing management improves. To maintain a closed flock, James is replacing his North Country Mules with Lleys.

Both Mike and James will share more about their travels in due course.

Find out more about the project, and Mike and James, at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-eorganics.



Mike Adams and son Monty.



James MacCartney.

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Love Lamb Week 2021 campaign success



Taking place in its traditional spot from 1st September, Love Lamb Week 2021 once again drew attention from media, retailers and consumers.

With the topical theme of sustainable sheep farming central to all Love Lamb messages, its main campaign web page, hosted on AHDB's website, attracted almost 30% more visits compared to 2020 – indicative of an increase in awareness and interest on lamb by the general public.

Levy board activity in all UK nations resulted in both local and national press carrying eye catching advertisements in high profile newspapers such as The Guardian and The Sun, and several major supermarkets also carried in-store and on-line promotions, which helped boost the campaign.

NSA once again supported the campaign by sharing positive

information and farmers' own stories via social media and through press activity. It also dedicated its August NSA Breakfast Club to discussions about planned Love Lamb activity for 2021, to update and inform farmers.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James comments: "Through the Love Lamb activity and that of other levy board campaigns, and sharing of sustainable sheep farming stories from organisations such as NSA, it seems consumers are growing increasingly aware of the benefits of adding lamb to their shopping baskets.

"The NSA Breakfast Club was extremely well received by our sheep farming members, as it helped show producers exactly how the levy boards are working to increase demand for lamb. There is a lot of good work being done at the moment, and this can only result in a renewed interest in sheep meat from the British public."

Campaign's new faces

A recent competition searching for a sheep farmer to front the social media activity of the Love Lamb campaign has found not one but two enthusiastic young shepherds, both ready to take on the challenge to 'promote, educate and inspire'.

Love Lamb Week was established in 2015 by Cumbria-based sheep farmer Rachel Lumley in response to poor lamb prices and low domestic consumption. Rachel sadly passed away in 2020. The new faces of the campaign will now continue Rachel's legacy and honour her name and ambition to improve the nation's taste for delicious lamb.

Having submitted short video clips explaining their suitability to take on the role, Ernie Richards from Hay on Wye on the borders of Herefordshire and Powys, and Amy Matravers from Loughborough, Leicestershire, were both chosen for their passion for sheep farming and ideas on how they would like to share their farming journeys with the social media audience.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James says: "NSA is proud to work alongside the UK levy boards and other industry organisations to support the delivery of Love Lamb Week each year. NSA recognises, however, that the success of the campaign is boosted by farmers' own activity and telling personal stories about their work to produce a sustainable delicious product in the UK's beautiful countryside. NSA is confident Ernie and Amy will do a fantastic job of this while, at the same time, helping to grow the following of the Love Lamb Week social media accounts."

Ernie and Amy, now acting as the new 'Faces of Love Lamb' will soon take over activity on the Love Lamb accounts on both Facebook and Twitter.

Ernie Richards

I'm a first-generation farmer working as a shepherd on an upland farm that overlooks Hay-On-Wye. I live there with my girlfriend Anna and our young son Harry.

For the past five years I have managed a flock of 1,000 pedigree Lleyne ewes, working with the Morris family. We run a high-health-status closed flock and sell up to 300 breeding yearlings annually. We also finish all our entire ram lambs, selling them deadweight for maximum return.

Growing up, I helped my grandparents on their small sheep farm. This sparked my passion for agriculture and British food. I am an active and strong supporter of Young Farmers, taking up its many opportunities. I am always forthcoming and support a number of industry organisations, including joining NSA through the Next Generation Ambassador programme.

I am looking forward to having the chance to promote sustainable sheep farming and showing people that lamb can be a part of a healthy and balanced diet.



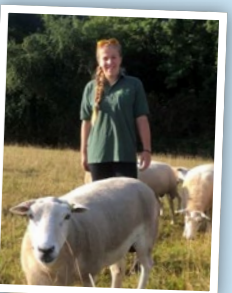
Amy Matravers

I farm alongside my parents on our 120ha tenanted organic farm. We run 280 Lleyne and 50 Poll Dorset breeding ewes. We lamb the Lleys indoors in March and the Dorsets lamb in September, as this fits in well with producing top-quality grass-fed lamb for Easter.

We produce great tasting, grass-fed lamb, sold directly to our customers through our farm shop, where I assist in the butchery. We also keep a small herd of Longhorn cattle and some small petting animals, which work well alongside my childcare business, Little Farmers. This provides wrap-around care for primary-aged children during term time and holidays.

Sustainability, biodiversity and high animal welfare are top of our agenda. We maximise the land's fertility through rotational grazing and recycling farmyard manure, as well as having some arable rotation to help maintain rich grass leys full of clover. We do our utmost to enhance the environment and minimise our carbon footprint. The majority of our farm is run on solar energy.

I am thrilled to be taking on the Love Lamb account. I can't wait to take everyone behind the scenes at our farm to explore a real farm-to-fork journey.



Marketing round up

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

Campaign returns to tell story of food and farming



The We Eat Balanced campaign returned at the beginning of September, highlighting to consumers the positive role meat and dairy can play in a healthy, sustainable diet.

The pilot in January was seen by 15 million UK households on TV and generated 80 million impressions on social media. It resulted in an increase in the number of shoppers who believed red meat and dairy could form part of a healthy, balanced diet, and that red meat is produced in both a natural and sustainable way.

The pilot highlighted the power and influence of social media and that's where efforts are being focused this autumn. AHDB knew it needed a presence on social media, as this is where the core audience of shoppers who are reducing, or thinking of reducing, their meat and dairy consumption are receiving lots of misinformation about British food and farming. Activities include short videos, telling the story of British farming told by farmers themselves.

Since January's campaign, which took place during a national lockdown, AHDB's consumer testing shows consumers' priorities have shifted in relation to their food choices.

As in January, key messages are:

- Lamb, beef, pork and milk contain vitamin B12, an essential nutrient not naturally present in a vegan diet.
- Red meat and dairy produced in Britain is amongst the most sustainable in the world.
- Lamb, beef, pork and milk are produced in the UK to world-class food and farming standards.

As well as social media, the campaign will feature on supermarket shelves, online advertising with the Mail Online and full-page adverts in national newspapers. A third phase of the campaign is planned for next January, which will see We Eat Balanced return to TV screens.

Following @WeEatBalanced on Instagram and Facebook or @TheAHDB and @AHDB_BeefLamb on Twitter and get involved in the conversation.



Activity focuses on retailers and young people



HCC's marketing activity in 2021 has focused on working with retailers large and small, as well as promoting the strong story of quality and environmental sustainability that PGI Welsh Lamb enjoys.

Retail sales have increased during the past 18 months and retailer support for initiatives around Wales' 'Lamb Day' in August and Love Lamb Week in September has been excellent. Many came on board with new lines and added their own resources to promotion in-store and on social media.

HCC continues to grow its media advertising, concentrating on using the latest technology to offer the best value for money by targeting at groups of consumers who are most receptive to the message. This means farmers in Wales may not see as many video and media ads, but they're reaching the right people to impact sales.

Major investment has been made to ensure a balanced message reaches young people. To coincide with the start of the academic year, HCC launched a brand-new platform – redmeathub.wales – and a package of educational resources aimed at teachers and health professionals. The resources were developed with teachers and cover a range of topics from farm life and the origin of red meat through to cooking and enjoying lamb as part of a healthy and balanced diet.

Information about the 'Welsh way' of producing red meat is also included. Sustainability is a priority for the lamb sector and is core to the brand strategy and communications.

Young people need to understand where their food comes from and how it is produced. They need to be made aware of the facts before they are blinded by global figures based on mass-production and high emissions. The picture they paint is completely different to the reality of red-meat production in these islands and, particularly, in Wales.

Teachers, whether they work in primary or secondary education and whether they teach in English or Welsh, will find all kinds of resources to suit the pupils. They are colourful and appealing and suitable for ages three to 16 years, and include ready-made presentations and worksheets, recipes, videos, interactive quizzes, posters and booklets.

Driving demand for British wool carpets

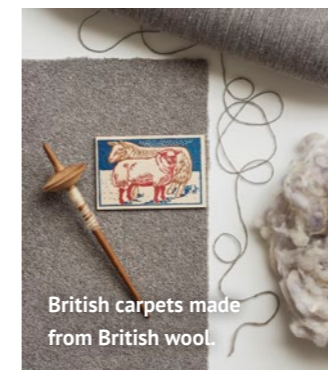


Wool Britannia is a new 100% British wool carpet yarn developed by the Headlam Group Pin partnership with British Wool, with the support of Campaign for Wool.

Every linear metre of the yarn includes wool sourced from farms situated in each of our four nations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales – making it truly British wool. This yarn, which is spun in Yorkshire, should increase the use of British wool in carpets and, in turn, help local farmers and the environment. Carpets made with the yarn are manufactured in Lancashire.

"The yarn will be launched into multiple ranges of new wool carpets across our extensive brand portfolio, the first being Manx Tomkinson's Seasonal Views wool twist range," says Headlam Group's Mike Dobson. "We sell to more than 8,000 retailers across the UK and initial reaction to the range, which was officially unveiled at the Flooring Show in September, has been extremely encouraging."

"This is a project we are confident will drive significant demand for genuine British wool carpets," adds British Wool Chairman Jim Robertson. "We have been working with the Headlam Group for a number of months on this initiative and will be providing ongoing support to ensure the project is a success for all parties, including the British farmers."



British carpets made from British wool.

Read more about Wool Britannia at www.woolcarpet.co.uk and the range at www.manxtomkinson.co.uk/range/seasonal-views.

Raising awareness shifts consumer behaviour



LMC's recent advertising campaign Good Honest Food has proven to be a winner with consumers.

The campaign told the real story of Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) beef and lamb from the perspective of renowned local chef James Devine, as he developed a host of versatile recipes while speaking to experts around the topics of health, sustainability and the NIFQA.

"Results confirm a 62% awareness of the campaign among NI consumers, which is much higher than the UK average," says LMC's Lauren Patterson. "And, according to the research, those aware of the messages contained within the campaign are significantly more likely to purchase NIFQA beef and lamb."

LMC-commissioned research identified consumer behaviour had shifted during the past year, with 2021 results showing a marked decrease in consumers describing themselves as vegan or vegetarian, relative to the previous year. Similar to 2019 trends, only 1% said they were vegan.



Consumers are looking to buy Scotch lamb.

Covid-19 challenges and opportunities



The past 18 months have presented many challenges to the Scottish food and drink sector, but positive behavioural changes and new habits are emerging.

Consumers are more conscious of supply chains, our impact on the environment and where our food comes from. Many are planning meals more carefully to provide vitamins and minerals that contribute towards good health and wellbeing. More are also buying locally and contributing to the local economy, society and supporting good farming practices.

It is encouraging to see consumers buy into this mindset and doing their bit to support local producers and suppliers. Shopping locally can boost the economy and bolster the livelihoods of Scotland's grocery retailers, butchers, farmers and other food producers. And it is a more sustainable way to shop.

QMS is promoting that Scotland is one of the most sustainable places in the world to produce beef and lamb. This is a nation where the abundant rainfall – however much people may complain about it – means farmers have plenty of grassland, which is perfect for grazing without the need for irrigation, and also captures carbon from the atmosphere and sequesters it into the soil.

Scottish sheep farmers are passionate about looking after the countryside and improving it for future generations. They are vital in sustaining the sheep and beef industries, which support around 50,000 jobs and livelihoods across rural communities.

Specifically, where red meat is concerned, regularity of lamb consumption has maintained a constant with 60% of consumers purchasing and consuming lamb at least once a week. Consumption of red meat as a category has increased in 2021 compared to the previous year.

This year fewer people said they were planning to reduce their consumption of red meat compared to 2020 (28%) and, consistently, two thirds of consumers recognise NIFQA beef and lamb is a natural source of vitamins and minerals, while also providing nutritional benefits as part of a balanced diet.

Importantly, 82% of consumers recognised the NIFQA scheme standards resulted in a product that was environmentally friendly.



Renowned chef James Devine.

Wooton Estate is home to a purebred, high-health-status flock of 2,500 Lleyn ewes.



Successful farm business leads way in promoting sustainability

By Katie James, NSA

Farming sustainably is core to JCB Farms' ethos and, across its two sites in Gloucestershire and Staffordshire, the business has been striving towards environmentally friendly, sustainable farming for decades.

It's a passion of Lady Bamford, founder of the Daylesford Organic brand under which all farm produce is sold.

Now, with the UK sheep sector being encouraged to make sustainability a focus, the sheep enterprise at the Staffordshire-based Wooton Estate, under the leadership of Head Stockman Matt Haydon, is an excellent example of efficient sheep production for the future.

Matt joined the company seven years ago, not long before becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, and has made several significant changes to the business. The flock increased to 3,000 head – 2,200 pure-bred Lleyn breeding ewes; a nucleus flock of 250 pedigree Lleyn ewes, providing the best genetics to produce the farm's replacement tups and nucleus flock ewes; and 650 replacement ewe lambs.

Goals

The flock is run alongside the estate's 160-cow suckler herd (Angus and South Devon) and 200 store cattle, plus 300 red deer hinds, across 3,000 acres of mixed farm and parkland. The closed, high-health-status, MV-accredited flock suits the farm and wider business goals.



Matt Haydon.

Matt explains: "The Daylesford brand ethos is all about organic food production, sustainability and traceability. Traditional, native breeds are chosen to suit the system.

"I believe sustainable farming in the UK can be achieved more fully with British breeds and that's the consensus of everyone involved in the business. We have the breeds available to farm in this way and using them also ensures a year-round supply of quality lamb, which is needed to supply the retail business."

A further 2,000 native breed store lambs, mainly Cheviot and Scottish Blackface, are also bought in each year to help achieve year-round supply. These lambs are run separately from home-bred stock to maintain the closed status of the breeding flock.

The main Lleyn flock lamb indoors from the beginning of April. Ewe lambs are crossed with a Ryeland tup and the flock lambs outside from mid-April. Justifying the choice of a less-favoured native breed, Matt says Ryelands 'work a treat' on the gimmer lambs. "They help provide a year-round supply to the abattoir. They finish easily at what can be a difficult time of year to finish lambs, and produce a good 19kg deadweight

carcase. Using fast finishing terminal sire breeds would mean trying to hold back the lambs so they finish at the correct time."

The flock scans at around 195%, typically losing only 15% from scanning to finishing.

With Signet performance recording essential to the business success, lambs are regularly weighed. The eight-week weight of ewe lambs is the determining factor on whether they will be kept as replacements.

"We've done this for the past four years and it has had the biggest effect on the quality of our genetics," says Matt. "All potential replacement ewe lambs have to be gaining at least 300g/day at that point for us to retain them. It's a good indication of the maternal genetics we are looking for."

Rotation

Lambs are weaned at 12 weeks with all stock then moved to finish on a 'green' diet. No concentrates are fed to lambs.

He says: "We rotate stock and then finish lambs on herbal ley mixtures – grasses, plantain, red clover, white clover, chicory and vetch. Kale is also used to finish stock through the winter."

Stock rotation with other grazing livestock on the estate could mean some conflict between systems. But Matt believes rotating them together has benefits. "When I began working for the business in 2019, one of my aims was to integrate stock. So we now rotate stock a lot and this has been part of what has helped performance during the past few years. It's also helped to improve soil health and reduce worm burdens," he says.

"We are trying to bring sheep into our arable rotations too. Winter stubble and cover crops are useful for winter grazing sheep, but are also helping to sustain a more healthy environment than the historical barren and ploughed fields, which were once common practice in an organic system."

Parasite control is carefully managed. Under Soil Association rules, stock is routinely FEC sampled and the farm is also aiming to breed for increased worm resistance by blood sampling the nucleus flock to identify ewes carrying IgA in their blood serum. This is an antibody linked in several studies to increased wormer resistance. "The combination of these efforts is definitely helping us reduce anthelmintic use," Matt adds.

Aiming to reduce antibiotic use and maintain a high-health-status, the flock is routinely vaccinated to minimise foot problems, abortion and pasteurella-associated disease. Matt follows a strict culling policy in efforts to continually improve health and progress genetics. The farm's successful retail business offers an option for cull ewes.

Mutton

"During autumn and winter we will sell a mutton range through the Daylesford shops and run about 300 of our cull ewes on until that time," he says. "The remainder will be sold through Bakewell Market. Mutton is definitely a growing market and we hope that eventually all cull ewes will be sold under our own brand."

All finished stock produced on both the Staffordshire and Gloucestershire-based farms is

put through Wooton Organic, the on-site abattoir, with 30 tonnes of red meat, including 200 lambs, processed each week.

"When I started with the business the throughput was much lower," says Matt. "We slaughtered just 60 lambs a week and some were sold to the open market, but demand has grown." Now all produce is sold under the Daylesford brand, through its own shops, online sales and through a high-end major online retailer.

Continued overleaf.

Farm facts

- Run across two sites.
- Daylesford Organic brand was founded by Lady Bamford.
- Flock comprises 2,200 purebred Lleyn breeding ewes; a nucleus flock of 250 pedigree Lleyn ewes, providing the best genetics to produce the farm's replacement tups and nucleus flock ewes; and 650 replacement ewe lambs.
- All finished stock from both sites put through Wooton Organic, the on-site abattoir.
- Target for finished lambs of 19kg deadweight with an R3L grade.

"I believe sustainable farming in the UK can be achieved more fully with British breeds."

Matt Haydon



Matt is supported in his role by a team consisting of students and experienced stockmen.



Lambs are finished on herbal leys during summer months and kale through the winter.



Lleyn rams bred from the nucleus flock and grown entirely on grass.

Lambs are selected aiming to meet the spec of R3L on the hook, averaging around 19kg deadweight. "This specification, from native bred lambs, is what suits the Daylesford butcher's counter. Our customers want a little bit of fat coverage," Matt says.

"It is incredible the way the enterprise has grown, from a relatively small farm to the success of the Daylesford brand today. And it is an exciting time to be involved as there are future plans for growth of the business."

Looking to future, with the farm already meeting many of the Daylesford brand and government's sustainability aims, changes to UK farming policy with Defra's new Environmental Land Management Scheme (the farm has signed up to take part in the Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot) are likely to have little impact on the estate's farming methods.

Matt is, however, conscious of the possible reduction in the level of support for farmers in the future and doesn't believe JCB Farms is immune to uncertainties such as trade deals. "The Daylesford business may be less susceptible

to slight fluctuations in the market and has the security of owning its entire supply chain. But if prices were to drop suddenly then, of course, it would have an impact. Our marketplace is still determined by the open market trade.

"Lamb prices are strong at the moment, so the associated costs of some environmental measures are financially viable. But if the price drops then it is harder to ensure more farmers are willing to embrace this type of farming.

Efficiency

"But I do think you need to target your marketplace and make sure it is suited to the capabilities of your system. We are fortunate to have a large area of land that allows us to farm more extensively. For some systems an intensive approach could be the only way to be profitable. Efficiency is key to sustainability, no matter the size of enterprise."

The future workforce for the sector is something Matt is also keen to encourage. The farm employs two students and Matt is supported in his role by shepherd Simon Walsh, stockmen

Chris Needham and Adam Gilman, Staffordshire-based Farm Manager John Reid, and Richard Smith, who oversees all agricultural business involved with the Daylesford brand.

A former NSA Next Generation Ambassador who has now progressed to representing NSA Central Region on the NSA English Committee, Matt is enthusiastic about giving the younger generation opportunities both through employment and on regional committees.

"The JCB family is also committed to encouraging and supporting young people in the industry. And, in addition to providing work support, I am keen to encourage young people to get involved in decision making. Being part of a group, such as the NSA English Committee, is a great way to do this," he says.

"It has a mix of farmers, both in age and farm experience, and is promoting the positives of the sector to the wider industry and key decision makers. With much of the discussion being about the future direction of UK sheep farming, it is important to welcome young sheep farmers to have their say."

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Socialise and learn new skills at an NSA Next Generation event.

NSA Next Generation winter conferences return



After a two-year absence, NSA Next Generation is looking forward to once again welcoming young sheep farmers to its popular winter conferences this November.

The free-to-attend events were held in two locations for the first time in 2019 and this successful format is set to be repeated in 2021. Thanks to the generosity of Shrewsbury Market in Shropshire and Stirling Agricultural Centre, Stirling, young sheep farmers from very different geographical areas will be able to attend the informative days. It is the first time this event has been held in Scotland.

Workshops

NSA is to be joined by industry experts to deliver a series of interactive workshops at the events, covering topics such as sheep health, grassland management, business planning, starting out in sheep farming, and the future of the UK sheep sector.

The events will be suitable for those already working in the sector or students with a specific interest in sheep farming, and will also be a great opportunity to learn more about NSA's Next Generation programme and its many varied elements supporting the future of the UK sheep industry.

Dates, locations and registration details at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

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Calling all young sheep farmers!

The NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme is preparing to open for applications for its 2022 cohort of enthusiastic young sheep farmers looking to build on their current knowledge and experience.

With Covid-19 causing much disruption to the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme during the past 18 months, it is hoped 2022 will allow for a group of 12 young people already working in the sheep sector to benefit from a series of interesting and enjoyable delivery sessions.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James, who coordinates the programme says: "The NSA Next Generation programme has helped more than 70 young sheep farmers since it began, almost eight years ago, with several well-known young faces from the sector having been part of it.

"The programme not only offers contacts with leading names within the sector, but also provides a fantastic opportunity to meet like-minded young people who all share a common interest. All involved with NSA Next Generation look forward to seeing what new faces the programme will attract this year."

Online applications for the 2022 group of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors will open following the winter conferences in November. Details will be available at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

In addition to the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme, NSA is also looking forward to welcoming applications for the NSA Samuel Wharry Travel Bursary soon. With Covid-19-related travel restrictions starting to ease, it is hoped the award recipients will be able to use the generous bursaries to explore sheep farming across the globe. Look out for further information on the bursary on NSA's websites and in the next edition of NSA Sheep Farmer magazine.

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Consultation: Changes to Livestock Identification, Registration and Movement



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Here are the 7 main proposals that you need to know:



1. Whole movement reporting:
Mandatory recording of departure and destination County Parish Holdings (CPH) on all movements for all livestock.



2. Journey information:
Mandatory recording of journey and transport information on all movement reporting for all species.



3. Mandatory same day movement reporting for Central Point Recording Centres (CPRCs).



4. Voluntary use of an online herd or flock register facility for all species.



5. Show and event movements:
Development of a voluntary circular movement reporting process for all species moving to and from showgrounds.



6. Pre-movement reporting:
Voluntary option for all movements to be reported before animals leave the departure holding. This can lead to the potential removal of paper during movements and registration.



7. Pig identification:
Gathering views on the introduction of an annual registration of all pig keeping holdings along with an annual inventory of pigs and future identification options.

Scan the QR code to view the consultation in full.



Other key announcements:

New cattle passports and cattle launch on EIDCymru in 2022

Official Bovine EID ear tags available from 2023

Manage My CPH to be a mandatory requirement from 2023

This consultation opens on 30 September 2021. To respond to this consultation you can use the online response form or contact AdnabodDaByw.LivestockID@gov.wales for a paper response sheet. Closing date to respond is 2 January 2022.

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Winners selected in NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway



Six sheep farmers from across the UK will benefit from top-class genetics following the latest NSA Next Generation initiative.

Having teamed up with sheep farmers Rob and Jo Hodgkins of Kaiapoi Romneys, the NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway, launched earlier this summer, gave enthusiastic young sheep farmers the opportunity to apply to be a recipient of a free Kaiapoi Romney ram.

The giveaway of the five MV-accredited and performance-recorded rams was made possible due to the Frank Parkinson Agricultural Trust, which donated funds to the Kaiapoi flock to import rams known to carry the Myomax double muscling gene into the UK in 2019.

Selection process

Following a rigorous selection process, including shortlisting by the NSA Policy & Technical Committee and final interviews with a selection of NSA and industry representatives, the decision was made to gift six, rather than the original five, rams. The judging panel faced a difficult task due to the incredibly high calibre of deserving applicants.

Coordinating the giveaway, NSA Communications Officer Katie James says: "We were overwhelmed by the interest in this giveaway and thrilled to receive such a high number of outstanding applications. This new element of the NSA Next Generation programme has, once again, demonstrated the high standard of knowledgeable, enthusiastic and highly motivated young farmers we have in the UK."

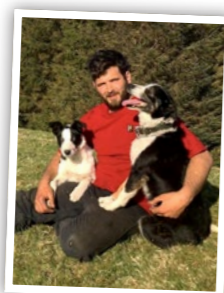
Meet the NSA Next GENE-eration winners

Ynyr Pugh Powys

I am a contract shepherd for a 400-ewe upland flock in Dinas Mawddwy, North Wales. In 2020 I was fortunate enough to begin share farming with a farming couple not far from home, comprising one upland and one lowland unit.

We are currently running a herd of 80 spring calving suckler cows and flock of 300 ewes, with the aim of doubling the flock during the next four years. We also want to improve grassland productivity to reduce the use of bought-in concentrates and improve the land's stock holding capacity.

We will be using the Kaiapoi Romney ram to breed replacements from our Texel cross ewes, which will thrive on the hill farm to hopefully harden the ewes without compromising their size. Results will be determined on ability to lamb outdoors on the hill holding (currently indoors on the lowland holding) to reduce cost and labour while, at the same time, also optimising production from grazed grass. We are also moving lambing back to April to maximise use of spring grass.



The six winners were favoured by the selection panel because it was felt the rams would fit well into the young farmers' extensive and forward-thinking systems.

Meaningful change

Rob Hodgkins of Kaiapoi Romneys says: "We have benefited from the goodwill of businesses and individuals for many years. It's important to Jo and myself to give back to the industry, now we are in a position to do so. We hope we can make some meaningful change to a lot of young farmers. We look forward to meeting the successful shepherds in person and working with them to see how we can help support their enterprises."

NSA intends to run this programme again next year. Information will be made available in early summer 2022.



Kaiapoi Romneys.

Stephen George Powys

We are a family-run farm consisting of 1,400 ewes. Traditionally we have kept Welsh and Speckle Mules in an intensive indoor lambing system, lambing in March with concentrates being fed from late January.

In 2018 I decided to purchase 180 Romney ewes, which were put to Romney rams with the plan to lamb outdoors in April and reduce labour and feed costs. Due to a successful lambing and the majority of lambs finishing well (42kg+ R grades, sold in autumn 2019). We purchased more Romneys and are now up to 600 head, with plans to increase to more than 2,000 and completely replacing our indoor-lambing Mule system.

The addition of the ram from Kaiapoi Romneys means we will be able to increase the size of our Romney flock at a faster rate, due to the even higher percentage of better quality ewe lambs being born in the spring. We intend to keep these females. The high maternal, survivability and meat yield traits of the ram crossed with our existing Romney ewes will be a huge boost to our already thriving system. We hope to produce the best lambs possible on an outdoor system, with the option of also performance recording and selling ram lambs.



Ed Bray Lincolnshire

I started my flock in 2005 with 65 ewes and one rented field. I am now lambing 1,150 ewes in partnership with my wife, Rhian, on 500 acres of rented grazing at home in Lincolnshire. We have been lambing outdoors since 2009 and I lambed my first New Zealand Romneys in 2010. We finish all our lambs.



We aim to keep improving the quality of our sheep and are increasing the size of the business as opportunities present themselves. Our long-term goal is to build a business that can support our growing family and provide a career for them in the future if they decide to pursue one in agriculture.

I think a Romney ram from the Kaiapoi flock will give us the opportunity to boost the quality of our breeding sheep. We hope a ram carrying the Myomax gene will help us sell lambs at higher carcass weights and improve our output, while continuing to improve all the other elements we value so much in the breed - lambing ease, thriftiness and high health.

Carys Jones Carmarthenshire

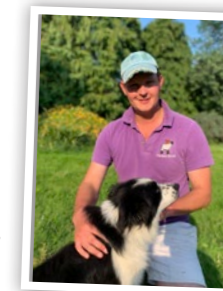
Our current sheep farming system comprises a 550-head improved Welsh ewe flock. We have a nucleus flock of 300 ewes, which are bred pure and fully performance recorded on Signet as part of HCC's Hill Ram Scheme. The remaining 250 ewes are mated to terminal sires. All lambs are tagged at birth and linked to their dam and sire. Eight-week and weaning weights are recorded for all lambs. Improved Welsh lambs are also back fat and muscle depth scanned. We retain 160 ewe lambs to allow for a strict culling policy in the main ewe flock. Ewe lambs are mated for one cycle to Charmoise rams and lambed outside from mid-April.



I plan to use the Romney ram on the Welsh ewes to produce crossbred ewes. I will compare offspring performance with the Welsh lambs. I hope the Romney cross lambs will show the known Romney traits of improved worm resilience and resistance and improved muscling from the Myomax gene. Their excellent maternal and foraging abilities are traits I hope to see in the Romney cross ewes, allowing us to move to a fully grass-fed system, using fewer inputs without compromising output.

Jethro and Lulu Agnew Norfolk

We run a mixed farming system in West Norfolk, which focusses on regenerative farming through arable and sheep enterprises incorporating mid-tier stewardship options. The farm has 500 breeding ewes, split between two lambing flocks. Suffolk cross Mule ewes lamb inside in late winter, and New Zealand Romney and Romney Marsh ewes lamb outdoors in late spring.



In our first year trading as JA Farming, we put these ewes to a mix of non-pedigree Romney rams and commercial continental breeds. This summer we purchased two Innovis rams to trial as a cross to achieve a good commercial lamb. But our business, which started trading independently in October 2020, does not yet have the sires to breed its own replacement ewes.

Breeding replacements and improving flock genetics is one of our principal short-term aims. The natural traits of the Romney, which performs well in an outdoor extensive lambing scenario and achieves effective slower finishing on a grass and forage based system, is well suited to the farm. The generosity of the gifting of a ram of this high genetic quality is pivotal to the future bloodlines of our flock. Based in a predominantly arable area, JA Farming also hopes to be able to share the benefits of sheep, particularly the Romney breed, in regenerative farming systems in the local area.

Chris McWhirter Devon

I'm a first-generation farmer, six years into a county council farm tenancy in North Devon, lambing 400 ewes and rearing 75 calves each year. My partner Claire and baby son Jack are also very much part of the business.



Our system is grass based and predominantly Mule and Mule cross ewes are lambed outdoors in mid-April. I use teasers to keep lambing tight and, due to a good supply of winter keep, haven't had to feed any lambing cake for three years. Winter keep and root crops mean I can finish almost all my lambs on forage but the final few typically don't go until April. My main aim is to increase efficiency from grazed forages and I want to try wintering ewes on fodder beet, as I do with cattle.

In my quest to produce replacement ewe lambs, I was yet to find a crossbreed that ticked all the boxes for our flock. So I am looking forward to using the Kaiapoi ram across my current Mule and Aberfield cross ewes to produce a desirable ewe lamb and increase the efficiency of ewes while, at the same time, maintaining the ease of lambing.



Don't bring in more than you bargained for

- If you're buying in new stock or bringing sheep back from grazing away from home, it's vital to quarantine those animals.
- Seek advice from your vet or animal health adviser – and ask if they're using the new SCOPS quarantine resources.



This SCOPS message is supported by NSA.

Visit www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/quarantine-advice-for-internal-and-external-parasites

Specialist sheep vets are key to future success of sector

Qualifying as a vet is a long and challenging process. But the future of the sheep industry relies on specialists coming through – like recently qualified Milly Eaton, who joined Bishopton Vets, North Yorkshire, this summer.

Living with her partner and running 1,200 North of England Mule and Beltex cross sheep, a future specialising in sheep practice seems an obvious route for her new career.

Milly says: "Coming from a farming family in the Yorkshire Dales, I always wanted to be involved in the livestock industry. Keeping my own sheep and working on sheep farms throughout my years of training highlighted to me the opportunities available to engage with farmers as a vet.

Milly believes she has joined the industry at a point of great change, with the new Health and Welfare Pathway set to further encourage farmer-vet engagement, in England at least.

"This will represent a great opportunity for me to engage with clients, but will also present

challenges. Convincing clients to reorder their priorities when buying in new sheep will be difficult in some cases.

"Pleasingly, an increasing number of farms already prioritise health when buying in, with vaccinated and accredited flocks achieving higher average prices. I hope to encourage compliance in disease eradication schemes in order to access funding to reduce losses from diseases like MV, OPA and Johnes.

Relationships

"I look forward to building relationships with clients to achieve goals and gain access to funding. We have a flock health scheme at our practice, which allows us to engage with farmers throughout the year and involves preventative health care and performance recording.



Milly Eaton

I think the future looks bright and exciting for recently qualified vets.

Having seen the progression from vets having limited contact with farmers other than at lambing, Nick Hart says now is an exciting time for Milly and others to become sheep specialists.

"The farmer-vet relationship at the start of my career tended towards a 'fire brigade' approach, centred around the time leading up to and including the busy lambing season. It was all about abortion and twin-lamb disease. Lambing was a great time to meet farmers and develop skills and knowledge of how flocks are managed. There were not many vaccines, so we did a lot of post mortems during the summer months.

"My interest in sheep increased during those early years of my career. I saw that vets could help farmers make positive changes to flock welfare and production.

"The most beneficial innovation to appear in those days was scanning for pregnancy. As a direct result we have seen a significant improvement in the health and welfare of

pregnant ewes in the period leading up to lambing, as well as early lactation."

With a career punctuated by devastating major disease outbreaks, Nick is particularly proud of the vet involvement in delivery of the National Scrapie Plan in 2000 and disseminating scrapie-resistant genes into the national flock.

"The collaboration between sheep vets and their pedigree clients demonstrated the real benefits that come from a positive relationship, and it has led to further involvement and sheep health schemes," Nick says.

Engagement

"I share Milly's hope the new Health and Welfare Pathway will further strengthen this. I've been involved in its formulation through the Sheep Veterinary Society and hope this engagement between vets and all sheep farmers

will have positive outcomes for the industry, the sheep veterinary profession, and the country as a whole.

"Although the job has changed a great deal during the years, the core principals have not. It is one of communication – talking and listening to farmers, understanding their needs and how the industry works, improving our knowledge and skills, working hard and, above all, enjoying what is, after all, a huge privilege."



Nick Hart

Although the job has changed a great deal during the years, the core principals have not.



Performance recording and data collection is of interest to me. I find it rewarding to track progress towards achieving farm targets. It helps to remind us all why we do the job we do.

"I think the future looks bright and exciting for recently qualified vets looking to specialise in large animal practice, particularly in sheep, with lots of opportunities available."

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Is there a future for small abattoirs?

By Hannah Leese, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES
solicitors

There is a shortage of small abattoirs, particularly in rural locations, yet I believe the recent ban on the export of live animals for slaughter and finishing means they have a key role in ensuring the viability and security of many sheep farming enterprises.

I spend my days working with government departments and, more often than not, the Food Standards Agency (FSA), which is responsible for regulating the meat industry. The vast majority of my clients are slaughterhouses, which are the most heavily regulated sector in the food industry. All abattoirs are subjected to constant supervision by official vet and meat hygiene inspectors – government staff deployed to the plants to carry out official controls. These government officials are present at all times during operational hours, keeping a constant watch on the processing lines and identifying even the slightest misdemeanour.

Cases we work on range from challenging poor enforcement actions, from incorrectly served improvement notices, to defending criminal proceedings in magistrates courts, and everything in between. There is a common theme running through all the work – overregulation and, dare I say, the inconsistent application of regulations by FSA and its contracted personnel. The decline in the number of small abattoirs, in which overregulation has played a part, is a significant loss to the industry. And not only in terms of the removal of a professional and reliable local service to farmers but also in terms of the animal welfare benefits offered by small abattoirs. Travelling distances to small rural abattoirs tend to be shorter and, in my opinion, animals slaughtered in small low-throughput plants are given individual attention that simply cannot be offered in larger slaughterhouses.

Innovated

More than 25 small abattoirs have closed during the past five years, but those that have innovated and remained open are performing well. These abattoirs typically provide a contract-killing service whereby farmers bring their animals in for slaughter, pay the abattoir for that service, and the meat is returned to the farmers for further processing, for example cutting and butchering. There is demand for local, high-end mutton and lamb and small abattoirs have an important role to play in delivering this highly desirable premium product.

Sheep farmers and local abattoirs have a strong message to sell to consumers: we produce environmentally-friendly, high-end, welfare-friendly lamb. These are key consumer concerns. Not only do they have an appreciation of the impact of farming on climate change, but also animal



Consumers are keen to buy high-welfare lamb.

welfare has long been seen as a public good. Consumers expect animals to be treated well during the course of their lives and particularly at the time of slaughter.

But how can we ensure small sheep abattoirs can continue to provide this vital service? No one within the meat industry expects government handouts, but it could put measures in place to make the operation of small abattoirs far less burdensome.

Supervision

One unnecessary burden that could be removed immediately, with no adverse effect, is the permanent presence of vet officials in smaller plants. Slaughterhouses with good track records who are processing low numbers of animals do not need constant supervision by vets. A system of unannounced visits would promote good food hygiene and animal welfare standards. If the operator does not know when the regulator may visit then they are more likely to take steps to ensure high standards at all times. This supervision is both worthwhile and cost effective. The current system is, in my view, neither.

There is a role for sheep farmers and the meat industry alike to highlight the plight of the small abattoir. Farmers rely on this service and, when it's done right, there are huge gains to be made for both the farmer and the abattoir. Consumers want premium, environmentally-friendly, high-welfare meat and small abattoirs are a good way to achieve this. The Government could and should deploy measures to reduce the regulatory burden on such abattoirs and make the operation of small plants more efficient, viable and attractive.

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'Big picture' advisers set to play vital role in success of sheep sector

Having launched as a new initiative in June, the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) is continuing to develop and become increasingly functional for advisers and sheep farmers.

Producers wishing to seek expertise from a RoSA member can now search for an appropriate adviser on the website. And the online resource has an ever-expanding list of events where advisers can collect continual professional development (CPD) points to maintain their membership.

NSA worked with BASIS to create RoSA, with the vision of enabling qualified and well-informed advisers to support engaged sheep farmers become more profitable and sustainable. Four months since its creation, NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker considers the progress made.

Expertise

He says: "We have made a great start and are continuing to work towards RoSA being the port of call for any sheep farmer looking for expertise or advice. As more advisers register, the network will increase further still and RoSA will be the home for information, links and resources.

"We encourage sheep farmers and sheep-sector professionals to look at the website now and keep checking back as this work gathers even more momentum."

The criteria for becoming a RoSA member is that an individual adviser has a holistic understanding of the sheep sector. They will likely specialise in one area, such as animal health or environmental management, but must also appreciate how their expertise fits into the big picture so they can offer whole-business advice. That is the reason RoSA exists, in addition to existing CPD schemes so, for example, a vet can ensure they also know about changes to future farm support and environment payments. Or an SQP selling animal health products also has vital regenerative agriculture knowledge.

Or a nutritionist also values the importance of business benchmarking.

Mr Stocker continues: "Our aim for RoSA is to build on other schemes and offer opportunities for specialists to expand their knowledge into other complementary or important areas that are of value to sheep farmers. No one can be a specialist in all areas, but can offer an important service to farmers if they appreciate issues and have a 'big picture' vision of sheep farming businesses.

Prerequisite

"NSA thinks it's likely that future schemes will require farmers to take advice as a prerequisite to getting financial support. If that is the case, we want to make sure information comes with a sheep farming background. For example, an environmental adviser knows about sheep nutrition, management and health. Or a vet doing a health and welfare review as part of the proposed Health and Welfare Pathway considers the whole sheep farming business. We encourage all NSA members to encourage their vet and other advisers to sign up to RoSA."

Emily Gascoigne, a specialist sheep vet working in private practice with Synergy Farm Health in South West England, was one of the first vets to sign up to RoSA. She says: "I joined RoSA because



I saw the benefit of a membership signposting to CPD covering all aspects of sheep production and management"

"For me this will complement the sheep veterinary CPD available, but with the additional opportunity to meet other like-minded advisors from outside of the veterinary profession. This unique network is exciting to be part of.

"The breadth of the network is a key strength of the register with a background ranging from vets, nutritionist, grassland experts, RAMAs and more. Members are united by the common goals of sustainability, longevity, profitability and animal welfare."



Ingredients to make RoSA a success

- **Sheep farmers** to actively seek out RoSA-registered advisers and encourage the professionals they use to sign up.
- **Sheep advisers** to become RoSA members and collect 40 CPD points per year to remain registered (or 20 points for associate membership).
- **Training providers** to apply for RoSA points for their events, so RoSA members can collect CPD through the year.

With sheep farmers already talking about RoSA, and advisers from around the UK signing up, it's vital that event organisers get into the habit of applying for RoSA CPD points, in the same way they do for AMTRA and/or BASIS points. If you're an event organiser and want to know more, please attend a webinar explaining the process on Tuesday 26th October at 11am.

For webinar details and a list of events with RoSA points, visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events and www.sheepadvisers.co.uk/events.

New arrivals should be isolated from the rest of the flock.

Take steps to avoid buying in disease

Purchasing stock offers farmers the opportunity to introduce new genetics and blood lines to their flocks, but it is important not to dismiss the potential of also buying in disease.

Taking precautions, careful research and putting strict quarantine protocols in place can significantly reduce this risk.

Replacement stock should be sourced from as few farms as possible. Ideally animals should be purchased direct from a single farm with known disease status, eliminating the risk of stock mixing at sales. While this is not always possible, many pitfalls can be avoided with a little 'homework'.

Quarantine

Be aware of disease accreditation status, as well as any previous vaccinations or recent treatments. But do not take vaccination history at face value. It is often safest to assume incoming

Risk management during the quarantine period

Risk identification	Risk management
Feet	Check, treat and isolate, vaccinate.
Fertility	Vaccinate (if appropriate time), tup checks.
Disease	Appropriate testing/screening plan in place?
Parasites - sheep scab	Monitor, assess risk, blood test, treat.
Parasites - worms/fluke	Yard, drench for worms, assess fluke risk (flukicide), delay turnout.

stock is not vaccinated and treat it as such. Prior to purchasing, take time to take a good look at prospective stock. Diseases such as sheep scab, orf and caseous lymphadenitis (CLA) are often obvious on visual examination. So cast a keen eye over any animals you are looking to buy.

Effective quarantine protocols are essential when purchasing stock. New sheep should be isolated for a minimum of four weeks, ensuring isolation facilities prevent any direct contact with the existing flock. Initially, keep incoming animals off pasture until they have been effectively wormed. During the quarantine period there are four main issues to address or monitor including feet, fertility, disease screening and parasites.

The most common causes of lameness in sheep footrot and contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), and both can easily be brought in by bought-in stock. Inspect incoming animals' feet and treat and isolate any lame sheep to limit spread to the rest of the bought-in group. A sufficient quarantine period allows time for lesions to develop, should the animals be carrying

By Freya Cooper, Derwent Vale Farm Vets



infection but not yet appearing lame.

Footbathing is useful, if carried out properly, but can cause a multitude of issues if not. Having an area of hard standing to allow feet to dry post footbathing is essential. And if a flock is vaccinated against footrot, think about how these animals will fit into the current farm vaccination protocol to avoid being caught out.

Abortion

Purchased stock pose a risk of introducing causative agents of abortion, namely enzootic abortion (EAE) and border disease. It is vital to know if the flock they came from has a previous history of infectious abortion. Any purchased ewes that have lambed previously should be managed as a separate group until after lambing. This is because animals infected with *Chlamydia abortus*, the cause of EAE, less than six weeks from their due date in the previous pregnancy often abort the following year. If timing is right, use the quarantine period to vaccinate for infectious abortion.

For tups, ensure a pre-purchase tup check is carried out. Remember, they represent half of your flock. Tups must have adequate scrotal circumference, no dental disease, sound feet and be in good body condition. Enquire about the diet of any tups on their previous holding. An animal fed high energy concentrates on a daily basis and then moved to a grazing only diet will suffer nutritional stress at a time when it is vital to minimise the impact of stress.

There are several production-limiting diseases to be aware of when purchasing replacements, including border disease, Johnes, MV, CLA and



Skin scrapes can be taken to diagnose sheep scab.

OPA, which can each manifest in various ways within a flock. While it is not always feasible or even possible to check the disease status of every individual animal if large numbers of stock are being purchased, a representative screen could be carried out for some of the main diseases. Smaller numbers should be tested on an individual basis.

Blood sampling is a useful tool to detect previous exposure to MV, border disease and CLA, but results often require careful interpretation. Frustratingly there is not a 'one-size fits all' approach, so having conversations with a vet is always advisable to put together the most appropriate screening protocol.

Sheep scab can have massive financial and welfare implications for your flock. Clinical disease is now seen all year round and there is growing concern about the development of resistance to injectable treatments. Some sheep carry this mite without showing symptoms and it can take several weeks for classic signs to show in newly infected animals. All this means it can easily be brought unknowingly onto a farm.

Monitoring for lesions during the quarantine period is important. Skin scrapes may be taken for diagnosis if clinical signs develop, but there is now a blood test to detect disease before clinical signs are observed. Sheep that have been infected with the scab mite produce specific antibodies that can be detected from two weeks of the mite infestation. Given the rise in medicine resistance, this blood test is an essential tool in minimising unnecessary quarantine treatments, which may perpetuate the problem.

Resistance

Wormer resistance also poses a risk. The gold standard is that incoming stock should be kept off pasture and dosed with a group 4-AD (orange) and group 5-SI (purple) wormer to avoid bringing resistance onto your farm. After a minimum of three days, animals can be moved onto pasture grazed by the previous season's lambs. Should any resistant worms survive the treatment, they will be diluted by the existing flock's (hopefully) susceptible worm population. If animals have been moved directly to pasture from their

previous holding, where possible do not use this pasture again until it has been re-seeded.

Some farmers are not aware of their flock's liver fluke status. If this is the case, assume animals are infected unless you can prove otherwise through the use of strategic testing. However, in the face of developing resistance to some fluke products, the blanket treatment of all incoming stock is not sustainable in the long term.

The exception to this would be animals bought in during autumn or early winter, which may be at risk of acute disease. Animals carrying adult liver fluke can pass fluke eggs in their faeces for up to three weeks following successful treatment. It is vital these animals are placed onto pasture with no fluke habitat for at least four weeks post-treatment. Deciding on a fluke quarantine treatment strategy starts with establishing the risk status of the incoming animals before deciding on an appropriate treatment and should be discussed with your vet.

In summary, having a tailored and specific written quarantine protocol can go a long way to reducing the risks of buying problems in. Take the time to speak to your vet or adviser to create an effective plan for your flock and ensure you don't get more than you bargained for.

New SCOPS quarantine resources

SCOPS has recently updated its quarantine advice and produced new resources for vets and advisers. The materials are freely available online and include working examples of quarantine periods for different levels of risk for worms, fluke and scab. NSA encourages their use, and recommends farmers check their vet and/or adviser is aware of the updated information.

More at www.scops.org.uk.

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Low profit margins can leave little room for investment in disease prevention.

How do farmers make treatment decisions for their flocks?

Many decisions made by farmers not only directly impact the health, productivity and profitability of their own flock, but also have implications beyond their individual farm.

If we are better able to understand how these decisions are made, we will be able to successfully support the development of best practices, initiatives and policies.

Research around stakeholder decision making is ongoing at Nottingham University, and a key area of farm decision-making research is around antibiotic use. As part of an AHDB-funded PhD

research project, six studies were conducted looking at sheep and beef farmers' practices, opinions, and decision-making on antibiotic use.

The work highlighted six common factors that influenced farmers' antibiotic decision-making – identity, experience, social norms, capability, responsibility and emotion.

Perceptions

Identity is linked to perceptions of risk around the use of antibiotics and how they are shaped by what farmers understand as symbols of being 'a good farmer'. High animal welfare is an important symbol of being a good farmer. This influences some farmers to use excessive antibiotics in an attempt to prevent disease. The picture is complex because wanting to align with the 'good farmer identity' is increasingly driving more responsible antibiotic stewardship practices.

Experience in the use of antibiotics was also a key theme within the research. For example, negative experiences at a previous lambing time led some farmers to routinely use antibiotics in subsequent seasons in the belief it may avoid similar experiences. Farmers' perceptions of the risks around antibiotic use and resistance were also influenced by their past experiences, with farmers who had previously experienced resistance to wormers being more aware of the financial risks of antibiotic resistance. Similarly, farmers who had previously difficulties treating disease, felt at high risk of developing antibiotic resistance on their farms.

By various contributors flockhealthltd

Social norms also play a role in decision making around antibiotics. There are two types of social norm: descriptive and injunctive. Descriptive norms refer to perceptions of other people behave and injunctive norms refer to perceptions of what behaviour is approved or disapproved by others. In a survey of 461 sheep farmers, 22% were using antibiotics for prevention of watery mouth, joint ill or illness in all of their lambs, indicating routine antibiotic use in lambs was still relatively common. A further study showed the use of oral antibiotics had become normalised on sheep farms, and so oral antibiotic use did not necessarily carry the same stigma as other forms of antibiotic administration.

Behaviour

Capability refers to how capable a person is, or how capable the person believes they are, to carry out a behaviour. The research revealed external factors prevented some farmers from having the ability to control diseases without antibiotics. For example, the low profit margins of sheep and beef farming left little room for investment in disease prevention strategies.

These external factors affecting capability are important because they represent a barrier between knowledge and implementation of recommended practices. Even though farmers knew optimal colostrum management and a clean environment were effective strategies for the prevention of neonatal lamb disease, some

farmers said these were not always practical to put in place. Internal factors also impacted farmers' perceived capability around reducing antibiotic use. Farmers sometimes put disease events down to fate or luck and, therefore, believe the event was out of their control.

Influences

Farmers' perception of responsibility had several influences on their decision-making around antibiotic use. Some farmers felt a personal moral responsibility to ensure appropriate antibiotic use. These farmers took responsibility for the risks of antibiotic use by adopting the precautionary principle and making changes to biosecurity and practices to manage animal health. Vets were also seen as having responsibility for antibiotic use on farms because they make prescribing decisions.

Emotion is often important in decision-making, particularly when decisions come with risk and uncertainty. The research showed how sheep and beef farmers feared disease in their animals and drew on their emotional ties with their animals to justify antibiotic use. Similarly, feelings of fear and regret shaped farmers' decisions to routinely use antibiotics in their lambs. Their emotions were based on previous experiences, which may have resulted in death and illness in their animals.

While we are becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of the decision-making processes surrounding antibiotic use on farms, other areas of decision-making are still little understood.

This article has been provided by Flock Health with contributions from Charlotte Doidge, Fiona Lovatt, Jasmeet Kaler and Alice Smith.

Take part in scab-control survey

Nottingham University is currently undertaking anonymous research into British sheep farmers' attitudes, behaviour and decision-making around preventing and controlling sheep scab in their flocks.

If you farm sheep in England, Scotland or Wales, please take part in the survey, whether or not you have previously experienced sheep scab in your flock. To participate, please visit www.nottingham.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/sheep-scab-survey-2021.



FOR FLOCK'S SAKE

The For Flock's Sake sheep scab project currently underway in three hotspot areas of England, and coordinated by NSA in the South West, aims to demonstrate how a collaborative, community-led approach can enable decision-making for managing this debilitating and costly disease.

Working in designated groups, known as 'clusters', the project team is partnering with farmers to identify the level of disease, using the ELISA test developed by Moredun, and assess the biosecurity measures in place. The team is also gathering information to help better understand how to effectively manage scab in different farming situations. *Further information about the project and how to take part is available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-for-flocks-sake.*



Flock treatment decisions are influenced by many factors.



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Multi-species swards offer production and environmental opportunities



Farmers are facing many challenges including increasing fertiliser costs, anthelmintic resistance and extremes of weather, as well as demands to reduce their carbon footprint and improve biodiversity.

Research across Britain and further afield has revealed that multi-species swards present an opportunity to address many of these challenges by reducing the requirement for artificial fertilisers and anthelmintics, resilience to weather extremes (particularly drought), improved soil quality and carbon sequestration, and enhanced biodiversity both above and below the ground.

Partnership

A new European Innovation Partnership project, led by AgriSearch using EU and DAERA funding, is determining the feasibility and practicality of incorporating multi-species swards on Northern Ireland's commercial beef and sheep farms. The project group comprises three sheep farmers and three beef farmers working in partnership with technical partners from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and Queen's University Belfast.

Multi-species swards have been established on each of the six participant farms, exploring

the different establishment techniques and opportunities and challenges arising as a result of incorporation within a range of Northern Ireland farming systems.

Dale Orr, sheep farmer and project participant, says: "There is a growing interest in multi-species swards among Northern Ireland farmers, but there is a lack of practical information about how they can be established, managed and utilised successfully. We will be using this project to share our experiences as a group and increase the knowledge base surrounding multi-species swards."

Mr Orr farms near Strangford, County Down, and lambed 368 ewes and 73 ewe lambs in the spring of 2021. He aims to maximise grazed grass utilisation with minimum external inputs. His flock grazes for a minimum of 300 days per year and is outwintered on stubble turnips and silage. Rotational grazing, with five-acre paddocks, is used across the whole farm.

In recent years he has turned his attention to sward composition, creating different species mixes based on their intended purpose.

The majority of swards on Mr Orr's farm comprise more traditional white clover/perennial ryegrass swards. Long lasting, they can be used for both grazing and silage and will tolerate grazing all year round. A productive red clover and perennial ryegrass sward is used for three

cuts of high energy and protein silage each year – key in a system that does not feed concentrate at any time of the year.

Mr Orr has also established smaller areas of multi-species swards across the farm. In 2018 he sowed 25 acres with a six-species mix (intermediate and late ryegrasses, white clover, red clover, chicory and plantain), which he found in a direct comparison with the white clover and ryegrass sward (100 ewes with doubles on each) to be beneficial for lamb finishing rates. Up to 12 weeks of age, on average, the lambs on the multi-species sward grew 12% faster and went to the abattoir 26 days earlier.

Anthelmintics

Building further on the success of the six-species mix, Mr Orr trialled a pure herbal ley mix (red clover, white clover, plantain and chicory) with the aim of finishing lambs quickly with a reduced requirement for anthelmintics. The mix has so far been found to stay leafy and palatable all year round and, so far, lambs have been achieving growth rates of approximately 350g/day without concentrates.

As part of the project, Mr Orr is now also trialling a drought-resistant multi-species sward (cocksfoot, meadow fescue, timothy, red clover, white clover, plantain and chicory) to further improve grassland resilience. The past four years have seen three very dry spring/summers in the region, and such trends are likely to continue. Sown in spring 2021 the management and performance of this sward will be monitored and analysed, and the results will be disseminated widely.

Jason Rankin of AgriSearch says: "While multi-species swards have been found to provide a range of ecosystem benefits during research trials, uptake on commercial farms remains fairly limited. Mr Orr's experience, to date, shows these wider benefits do not have to come at the expense of reduced performance. But a shift in mindset is required."

"By sharing both the successes and issues faced by farmers participating in the project, the opportunities multi-species sward can offer are accompanied by the practical steps required to successfully incorporate them into different farming systems."

More at www.agrisearch.org, or by contacting Jillian Hoy at jillian@agrisearch.org.



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Sustainable parasite control project focuses on hill and upland flocks

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun 

Sheep farmers and vets are being invited to participate in a research survey, launched by Moredun Research Institute, to investigate ways to optimise parasite control in hill and upland flocks as part of a PhD research project.

The four-year project – ‘A holistic approach to internal parasite control on hill and upland sheep farms’ – will be carried out by Eilidh Geddes and supervised by researchers from Moredun Research Institute, Scotland’s Rural College and Edinburgh University Vet School.

There are approximately 15,000 hill and upland farms with sheep in Scotland, representing more than half of the sector. Despite these numbers, sheep production on such farms is becoming increasingly challenging for a number of reasons, including parasite infections. The main parasites affecting grazing sheep and lambs are roundworms and liver fluke. These parasites have a significant impact on growth rate, productivity and efficiency, causing substantial production losses costing the UK sheep industry more than £40m/year.

Resistance

Roundworms and liver fluke are controlled through the use of anthelmintics. But regular whole-flock treatment may cause the development of resistance to these treatments, where they no longer effectively control the parasites. In 2020 the estimated cost of anthelmintic resistance in the UK, for roundworms alone, stood at more than £3m. So more sustainable strategies must be implemented to preserve the effectiveness of anthelmintics for the future control of these parasites.

Most research into anthelmintic resistance and sustainable control methods for roundworms and liver fluke has, to date, been conducted in lowland farms. But little is known about the parasite challenge and anthelmintic resistance issues faced on hill and upland farms. So this study aims to understand the challenge and investigate strategies to improve sustainable roundworm and liver fluke control on hill and upland sheep farms.

The project, which began October 2020, is working closely with nine farmers located across the length of Scotland, from the Highlands and



Anthelmintic resistance on hill farms is less understood than on lowland units.

Islands to Dumfries and Galloway, for three full production years from 2021 to 2024.

So far work has assessed the parasite burden on each farm and collected information about their approaches to internal parasite control. To achieve this, farmers post regular faecal samples from their animals to Moredun, where faecal egg count monitoring is carried out to monitor pasture contamination, conduct anthelmintic efficacy checks, and to provide material for the identification of the roundworm species present.

To develop a more complete understanding of the impact of parasites on each farm, more general management data such as grazing history, animal performance and economic information is also being collected.

Following initial data collection and analysis, customised strategies for roundworm and liver fluke control will be proposed for each farm. After discussion and agreement from the farmer, these approaches will be implemented and monitored on the nine farms during the following two full production years.

Interventions

Proposed interventions will vary depending on the specific farm, their production system, goals and the resources available. But may include simple measures, including ensuring effective anthelmintics are used and altering dosing strategies. Once implemented, economic and animal performance data will be collected to analyse the management and financial impact of optimised parasite control at farm level.

This will allow the development of practical recommendations on how to optimise internal parasite control on hill and upland sheep farms.

To broaden the understanding of the parasite control challenges faced across Scotland, and make this research more applicable to a wider remit of farms, this project is also looking for Scottish hill and upland sheep farmers and large animal vets to complete a short survey. The results of this survey, in combination with data collected from our nine farms, will help with the proposal and development of practical recommendations on how to optimise internal parasite control.

Fill out the survey

Moredun is looking for farmers and vet practices in hill and upland areas to complete a short questionnaire.

The farmer survey, aimed at hill and upland sheep farmers in Scotland, takes around 20 minutes to complete and can be found at bit.ly/315J5ID.

The vet survey, which is aimed at large animal vets with upland and hill sheep clients, takes around 10 minutes to complete and can be found at bit.ly/3cQfsdy.

If you would like to request a paper copy of this survey, please contact Eilidh Geddes at eilidh.geddes@moredun.ac.uk.

Mud snail detection key to fluke control in Welsh flocks

Detecting mud snail DNA in water is a technique that's helping to identify areas on Welsh farms where sheep are at risk of being infected with liver and rumen fluke.

The presence of *Galba truncatula* mud snails is a significant risk factor for fluke infections in sheep, because they are essential to the fluke's lifecycle.

Detecting these snails, which are not present in all wet areas, is not easy. Trained staff are needed to identify potentially suitable habitats and find the tiny, elusive creatures and differentiate them from other non-fluke transmitting snails.

With funding from the European Innovation Partnership Wales, six Ceredigion-based beef and sheep farmers are working with IBERS, Aberystwyth University and the Ystwyth Veterinary Practice on a project to investigate whether fluke mapping using environmental DNA (eDNA) can help control fluke on their farms.

Screened

Earlier this year, water from habitats on the six farms was collected and filtered through eDNA capturing filters. These were then screened for the presence of mud snail DNA.

The test results are now being used to create a detailed map showing fluke infection risk areas on each of the project farms, to inform decision making around the management of fluke-infection risk areas.

Interventions to reduce contact between livestock and fluke on pasture, such as fencing and drainage, can be costly so

specifying and prioritising habitats that pose the highest risk should help inform decision making about where to take action.

IBERS' Rhys Jones, who led the water sampling and analysis aspect of the project, says he hopes the project will help farmers make informed livestock management decisions, in consultation with their vets, to help control fluke and reduce reliance on triclabendazole treatment.

Triclabendazole resistance is a major threat to the sustainability of sheep production in many areas of the UK.

"By identifying fluke infection areas, farmers can take measures to reduce fluke infections in their flocks rather than using a blanket treatment approach," says Dr Jones.

Habitats

In the early stages of the project, multiple areas were identified on each farm where mud snails are present. These areas include small habitats resulting from broken drains, spring heads and open ditches. They then looked at how these areas could be managed to limit fluke risk.

However, there are many larger habitats identified in the project where draining and fencing are not feasible.

"But by testing animals regularly, and treating when necessary with appropriate products, the farmers involved in the project have been able to limit the amount of fluke eggs shed onto these mud snail habitats earlier this year," adds Dr Jones. "And this should lead to reduced fluke infection risk this autumn."

The project will continue into 2022 with further testing of water and animals planned.

By Debbie James, Farming Connect



Practical steps to reduce fluke infection risk

- Target the snail**
 Mud snails thrive in soils that are wet during the summer months. Drainage and maintenance of drains and water troughs can remove and limit these areas.
- Protect the snail**
 To infect livestock, fluke must first infect the mud snails after hatching from eggs that are shed in livestock faeces. Minimising contamination of mud snail habitats with fluke eggs can, therefore, reduce the opportunity for mud snails to become infected. Regular testing of sheep, particularly in spring when mud snails become active, can identify groups of animals shedding fluke eggs onto pasture and help inform a responsible treatment plan.
- Test and treat livestock responsibly**
 Fluke risk will vary from year to year, and from farm to farm, and regular adjustment to treatment schedules may be required. Regular testing with diagnostic tests appropriate for the target animal and the time of year is essential. Following a vet-guided fluke control plan can limit resistance development by ensuring triclabendazole is not overused in a flock, by tailoring the use of other animal medicines at appropriate times, and by guiding appropriate quarantine treatment of bought-in animals.
- Protect livestock**
 Grazing strategies should limit access to high-risk areas by vulnerable animals during the autumn and winter periods. Temporary or permanent fencing can be erected to limit animals grazing high-risk areas.

Results are being used to create maps showing fluke risk areas.



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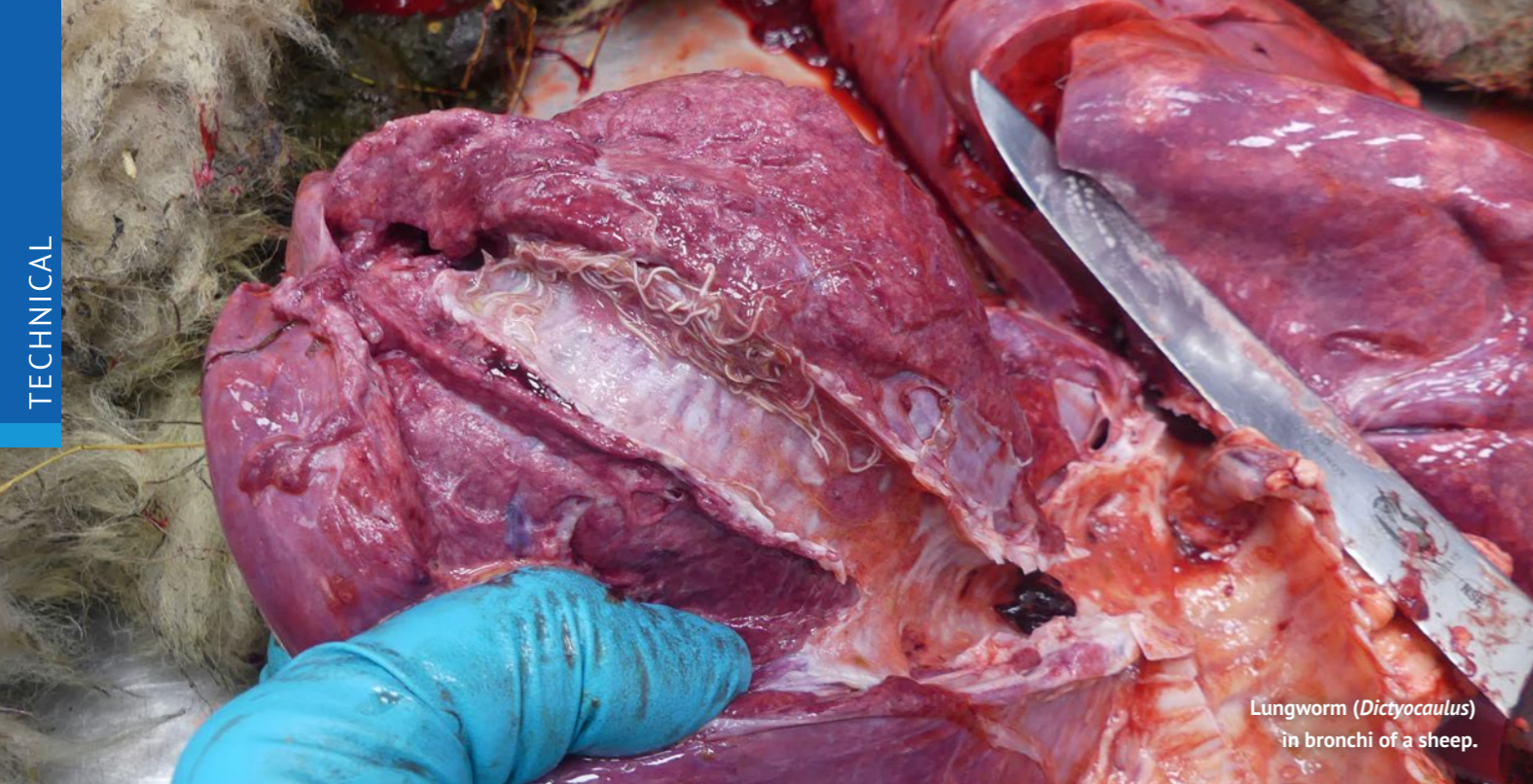


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Lungworm (*Dictyocaulus*)
in bronchi of a sheep.

Post-mortem project investigates cause of death in thin ewes

By Amanda Carson, APHA



In autumn 2020 APHA invited vets to recruit farms in England and Wales to submit three thin ewes for post-mortem examination.

This was to investigate potential causes of poor condition and, specifically, to see if the iceberg diseases Johne's, maedi visna (MV), caseous lymphadenitis (CLA), ovine pulmonary adenomatosis (OPA) and border disease were present in the flock.

Other conditions seen on examination, such as pneumonia and dental problems, were also recorded. Faecal egg counts, total worm counts in the gastrointestinal contents, and trace element analyses were not included.

A protocol for the post mortems, sampling and testing was developed and, in total, 198 sheep from 75 holdings were examined across the surveillance network between November 2020 and May 2021. The age of animals examined ranged from two to seven years. The presenting sign was wasting in all but one submission, where respiratory signs were recorded.

Diagnosis

Johne's disease was identified in 24 flocks (31%) and in 23 flocks this diagnosis was made by PCR on pooled faeces. Typically Johne's presents as thickening of the lining of the small intestine, with a corrugated appearance and yellow discolouration.

A total of 74 flocks were tested for border disease virus, but no virus was detected using PCR in pooled serum from these flocks.

CLA was identified in one flock, in which a ram was included in the submission. PME showed multiple abscesses throughout all this ram's lung lobes. *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis* was found to be the organism causing CLA. While this finding was significant for the individual ram, it could be less so for the remainder of the flock if the animal had been bought in, depending on how much the ram has mixed with the rest of flock.

MV testing using the AGID test was performed on individual samples from sheep submitted from 73 flocks, and six flocks had positive results (one clear positive and five weak positive).

The weak positive cases were followed up with lung tissue testing. In one flock examination of the lungs and udder tissue from the three sheep, which had returned a weak positive result, MV was confirmed.

Further testing

Follow up testing on lungs and udder tissue was performed in the four remaining weak positive flocks and did not support a diagnosis of MV. But early disease lesions may be microscopic and unevenly distributed throughout the lungs. In one of these cases OPA was diagnosed, where the gross lesions seen were indistinguishable between OPA and MV.

An assessment of the flock status by additional blood testing of a targeted group of ewes would be the next step in establishing the potential impact and influence of MV on ewe condition on these farms.

OPA was suspected in sheep submitted from 10 flocks where the pathology described creamy white, very firm tissue within the lung lobes.

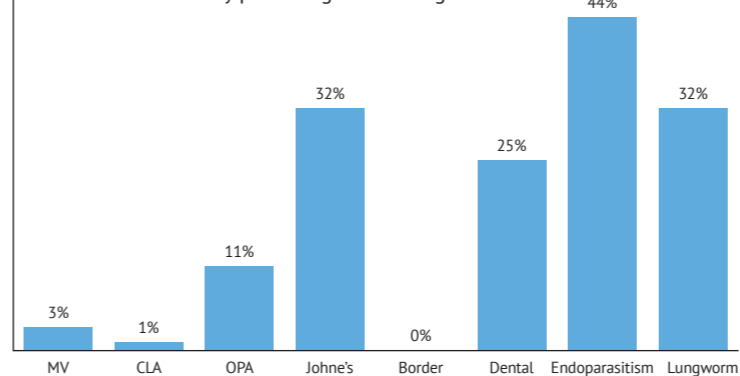
In eight cases this was confirmed by tissue sampling and testing. In the other two suspect cases this testing confirmed the presence of MV in one and chronic pneumonia in the other.

MV and OPA can appear similar on examination, particularly in chronic cases where there are extensive lesions and fibrosis. To enable a structured plan for control on farm a definitive diagnosis by tissue testing is required.

Evidence of chronic endoparasitism of the alimentary tract was described histologically in sheep from 33 flocks and would have been contributing to the ill thrift reported. In one case liver lesions consistent with exposure to large numbers of *Taenia hydatigena* (tapeworm) larvae were found.

Parasitic pneumonia was found in sheep from 24 flocks. Nematode worms were typically found via tissue sampling and testing, and lungworms were visible in the airways.

Diseases identified by percentage of holdings.



Significant dental disease was observed in sheep submitted from 19 flocks. This included missing and malalignment of the molars, absent and worn incisor teeth, and bone loss due to inflammation of the bone cells secondary to dental disease.

Five flocks had no evidence of iceberg diseases or other problems, including parasites that can spread in the flock and impact on production. We did find evidence of issues in some individual animals such as, for example, tumours that resulted in poor production but wouldn't spread to the rest of the flock.

Chronic disease

This project has demonstrated the value of post-mortem examinations in identifying causes of chronic disease by allowing for examination of all body systems, targeted testing and tissue testing confirmation.

Out of the 75 flocks investigated, 31 had evidence of one or more of the iceberg diseases – including Johne's, CLA, OPA and MV – but no border disease was detected (see graph). Five flocks had more than one iceberg disease identified – three had Johne's and OPA and two had Johne's and MV.

When presented with a flock problem it can be difficult to target test appropriately. Blood testing can be convenient and doesn't require loss of animals, but to determine flock prevalence requires testing many animals, which can be expensive. For some diseases, such as OPA, there is no diagnostic test in the live animal although ultrasound scanning can be useful.

Modification of this protocol might prove a useful tool for flocks as, for example, an annual flock screen on a proportion of cull ewes for disease monitoring and to provide evidence of flock health status.



(A) Typical yellow discoloration of the lining of the small intestine seen in Johne's disease. (B) Lungs markedly expanded by homogeneously cream white, very firm tissue – typical of OPA. (C) Malalignment of the caudal upper molars. (D) Osteomyelitis associated with dental disease.

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Pre-tupping vaccination key to preventing losses

Analysis of blood samples has revealed insidious infectious disease, such as toxoplasmosis, was a significant cause of barrenness or abortion in ewes earlier this year.

Samples from 375 UK flocks were tested when the subsidised FlockCheck diagnostic service was made available to vets from February to June this year. The results show 66.4% of units had one or more ewes testing positive for the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which causes toxoplasmosis.

Kat Baxter-Smith of MSD Animal Health says: "The continued high national level of exposure of UK sheep to *Toxoplasma gondii* highlights the importance of vaccinating ewes in this country against this productivity damaging parasite.

"Each year we consistently see about two thirds of UK sheep units testing positive for this serious, productivity-limiting parasite, so we urge all sheep producers to discuss their individual farm situation with their vet, well in advance of the upcoming autumn tupping season."

Widespread

Toxoplasmosis remains a key cause of barren ewes and abortion in UK sheep flocks. It also causes reabsorptions, mummified foetuses, stillbirths and weak lambs. As a result of the range of different diseases that can manifest, its impact on flock profit is often significantly underestimated. "Toxoplasmosis is so widespread

that the industry focus should be on preventing infection in breeding ewes," adds Dr Baxter-Smith. "Vaccinate replacements well before they go to the ram. Industry advice is to ensure every ewe is vaccinated before she breeds."

Abortion

Sheep pick up infection from the environment and typical biosecurity measures are not enough to control the disease.

Another underlying disease problem that often manifests itself as significant early lamb losses is enzootic abortion (EAE). This is caused by *Chlamydia abortus* bacteria.

"The disease can cause devastating abortion storms affecting approximately 30% of ewes," explains Dr Baxter-Smith. "Once a flock has the disease it is likely it will never disappear due to its persistence in carrier sheep. The disease often arrives on farm through bought-in replacements and is passed from ewe to ewe at lambing time. If an unvaccinated ewe is infected she will, more than likely, abort in the next pregnancy."

Dr Baxter-Smith urges farmers who recorded a flock barren rate greater than 2% during the 2021 lambing season to talk to their vet for advice, even if diagnostic blood samples have not been taken.



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Following the flock

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Howard Tratt

NSA South West Region Chairman, Somerset



Going into autumn, I have more good grass available to me than I've had all summer.

The lambs showed this and weaned lighter than I'd have liked. Quite a lot of my grazing isn't suitable for mowing and got away from the ewes and went stemmy in mid-summer. I think this contributed to both poorer growth rates and increased scald in the lambs. It has, however, made it an easy year for selecting ewe lamb replacements. Retaining those that have thrived in the face of a bit of challenge will hopefully see improvements in the flock in the coming years.

Lambs are now on some clean aftermath grazing on a neighbouring farm and have altered dramatically. Any ewe lambs up to weight by November will be tupped and the rest will run dry until next year. The majority of the remaining lambs that don't finish will, grass depending, will be run through winter to finish as hogs.

I won't be tupping as many ewes as I had hoped this autumn, but feel it's important to focus on refining the flock before expanding. If problems breed problems, what's the point?

Ewe lambs that have thrived have clearly stood out, says Howard.



John's ewe lambs are either retained or sold as gimmers.

John Britton

NSA South East Region Treasurer, Hampshire



We run a flock of purebred Poll Dorset ewes on permanent grassland, with the ewes being grazed away from home for most of the time between weaning at 12 weeks through to scanning in early February.

Ewe lambs are either retained as replacements or sold as gimmers, with the wether lambs being sold as stores in September.

In July, coming up to weaning, a number of both ewes and lambs started scouring. Wanting to know whether it was due to the lush grass (how we would have loved some of this in 2020) or a worm burden, dung samples were taken from both ewes and lambs. Faecal egg counts indicated *Trichostrongylus* in the gut of both ewes and lambs. It was a moderate count in the ewes, not typically requiring blanket worming, but with a higher incidence in the lambs the advice was to worm all. Following worming with a levamisole drench the lambs are looking much brighter with a subsequent egg count demonstrating the effectiveness of the wormer.

In mid-August I attended an on-farm workshop on preparing rams for tupping and condition scoring both ewes and rams. It was good to meet up face to face with other sheep farmers, rather than the isolation of Zoom. Tips gained will shortly be put into practice as the next task is to check teeth, feet and udder together with body condition of both ewes and rams.

Jen Craig

NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Lanarkshire



It's been a really dry summer for us here this year.

The local reservoir is sitting at its lowest level in almost 40 years, and 7.5m lower than usual. The lack of rain caused some issues with grazing, but the better weather has suited the sheep this year.

My first experience lambing the North Country Cheviots went incredibly well. Out of 21 gimmers only one needed a helping hand and they've done a great job rearing their lambs with minimal input. They've been so good that I may just have to expand the flock again this year.

The Blackface lambs we're currently bringing off the hill are some of the best we've had in a long time. Their mothers will be glad of the rest, I'm sure, but look well having done a tremendous job of rearing them.

We're into our busy sale season now. The majority of the Cheviot cross store lambs have already been sold to a top of £75 and averaging £66 for 225. The Blackface wedders were all sold at the end of September, along with surplus ewe lambs and draft ewes.

It's been good to have some normality with the sales so far this season. I hope people take sensible Covid-19 precautions to allow the rest of the breeding sale season to continue without any issues, so we can all enjoy a long-overdue catch up.

Jen's Blackface sheep have performed well this year.



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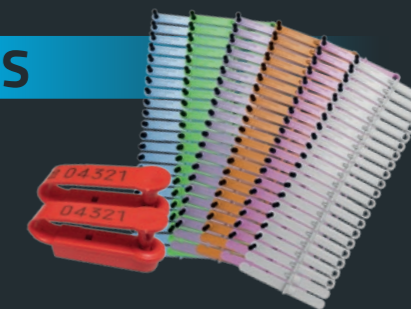
✓ VACCINATION & MINERAL DRENCH

Rams should be vaccinated for clostridial diseases and *Pasteurella* as well as checked for internal & external parasites. Ewes can be vaccinated for Toxoplasmosis and Enzootic Abortion four to six weeks BEFORE tupping. Mineral drenching can increase conception rates, decrease the amount of still births and help produce stronger lambs at birth.



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