

# SHEEP FARMER

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## SHEEP 2022

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## Embrace diversity – but strive for excellence



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

For those of you at NSA Sheep 2022 and NSA Scot Sheep, I hope you had as enjoyable and inspiring days as I did.

It is clear NSA sheep events still remain essential in sharing knowledge and bringing people together.

When things are going well, this is a busy but rewarding time for sheep farmers. A time when cash flow is generated and a time that gives satisfaction from selling sheep, and hope from buying them. To date, prices have remained strong, buoyed by a healthy export and domestic market, although margins are coming under immense pressure from inflationary pressure on inputs.

There is some truth in claims a strong market can price lamb out of the reach of consumers. But people have become too accustomed to low food prices, and food inflation will be an important factor in improving farm viability as the basic payment scheme works itself out of the system. At the moment it looks like the days of cheap chicken constantly pegging prices back are over.

### Costs

The challenge we face is controlling costs when inflation is ripping through every input we use. While there are lessons to be learnt from how sheep farmers in Australia and New Zealand keep fixed costs well beneath ours, I relentlessly make the case that regulatory differences between ourselves and them result in cost benefits in their favour.

In addition, the UK climate is different to the southern hemisphere and so are public expectations of farming. UK consumers are increasingly interested in where their food comes from, and processors and retailers of the importance of their reputation.

In addition to reputation, we are still tackling the dilemma of such a wide UK sheep diversity, yet only one main category of retail product – standard lamb. Could we do more with artisan sheep products, utilising British Heritage Sheep better to make an asset of diversity rather than constantly challenge it?

Diversity is now recognised as a positive thing – in nature, in people, in diets. Why should

sheep genetic diversity be any different?

All these breeds have their own traits and place, and many host unique characteristics not well understood (yet). At a farm level we have a huge amount of creativity in breeding, and our sheep genetics are almost exclusively independently owned.

But diversity, however good, presents its own challenges. There is too much variation within breeds and, while that's not always a bad thing, the identification and removal of lower performing individuals, or those with higher levels of greenhouse gas emissions, would do a lot to progress quality, productivity and the environment. Conversely, identifying and selecting from proven, better individuals would progress desirable traits within the sector.

### Flock health

So as the sheep breeding season approaches and we look at sourcing new genetics we should also seriously consider sheep health. What more can you do to avoid buying in unwanted disease or parasites to your flock? If you're selling breeding sheep, has the time arrived to make your mark in the sales ring by investing in screening and monitoring stock?

The decisions will be left to the individual, but I can't stress enough the importance of buying from known sources and quarantining regardless.

With the launch of the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway imminent in England, it's the ideal time to engage with your vet, discuss the health status of your flock, best practice quarantine measures, and proactive, preventative management.

Stronger buyer demand for breeding sheep with declared health status is probably the only way we will see increased uptake of screening services and, with several major, UK-wide sheep disease prevention initiatives underway, covering a range of diseases, this will surely be a more important part of the future.

But whether its with genetics or health declarations, let's approach it in a way that secures the independent nature of sheep genetics and trade that makes our industry so rich.



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Helen Roberts, next to her father Jack Pryce (right), receiving award from NSA Chairman Dan Phipps.

## Industry contributions honoured at NSA Sheep Event dinner

More than 480 sheep farmers and industry representatives came together ahead of the NSA Sheep Event in late July for the pre-event dinner at the Three Counties Showground.

As well as enjoying a delicious meal (lamb cutlets of course!), the dinner provided the perfect opportunity to formally present Helen Roberts, a sheep farmer from mid-Wales, with the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Sheep Sector. Helen was announced as the 2021 winner in January this year with many industry roles to her name, not least organising the NSA Sheep Event.

The NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for Unsung Hero was also presented on the evening. Specially selected from amongst the hundreds of volunteers and officeholders who are at the heart of NSA, the prize went jointly to husband-and-wife team Jonathan and Carroll Barber of Wymondham, Norfolk.

Jonathan has been active with NSA for a great many years, including as past NSA Chairman and current NSA Vice President, but the award was specifically for his role as NSA Eastern Region Manager – performed with a huge amount of support from Carroll – and from which he is retiring in October 2022.



NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker (left) presents the award to Jonathan and Carroll Barber.

## Love Lamb Week returns

The annual celebration of delicious UK-produced lamb, Love Lamb Week, returns from Thursday 1st to Wednesday 8th September 2022.

The week-long campaign will once again highlight the sustainable nature of lamb production, alongside its many nutritional benefits, and farmers are encouraged to share this important message far and wide.

Katie James, NSA Communications Manager, says: "NSA urges everyone to get involved during the campaign week this year. Whether it's working with your local community to arrange events or simply increasing social media activity to share positive messages about sheep production, it could really make a difference to the campaign success and see more consumers add lamb to their shopping baskets."

NSA will be increasing its promotional activity during the week, ably assisted by the two Love Lamb Ambassadors, Ernie Richards from Herefordshire and Amy Matravers from Leicestershire. For the past year, the pair have worked tirelessly to increase engagement with the Love Lamb social media accounts. They also attended NSA Sheep 2022 in the Asda and Dunbia cookery theatre to share some tasty recipe ideas. *Love Lamb Week inspiration at [www.ahdb.org.uk/lovelambweek](http://www.ahdb.org.uk/lovelambweek).*

#LOVE  
#LAMB



## NSA Breakfast Club set for return

After a break to allow for summer holidays and the busy NSA Sheep Event preparations, the NSA Breakfast Club webinars will return on Wednesday 7th September. Join the early morning session for a topical discussion about buying in stock this autumn. *Register now at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars).*

## SBRT bookings open

NSA is pleased to be involved with the Sheep Breeders Round Table (SBRT) again this year.

With the theme of 'UK sheep genetics delivering for the nation' the conference will take place on Friday 11th to Sunday 13th November near East Midlands Airport, Derbyshire. Returning after an extended gap due to the covid-19 pandemic, the event will welcome leading names from the UK sheep sector to share the latest research findings on pedigree breeding. *More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT).*

## NSA raises funds for vital charity

NSA has been pleased to raise important funds to aid the Farming Community Network (FCN) over recent months.

Attendees of NSA Sheep 2022 gave generously to the agricultural charity, both at a raffle at the dinner and the auctioning off of four lambs carcasses the next day. In addition, NSA Chairman Dan Phipps (pictured) completed a 100-mile bike ride to raise money for the charity. *There's still time to donate at [go.nationalsheep.org.uk/Just-Giving-Dan-Phipps](http://go.nationalsheep.org.uk/Just-Giving-Dan-Phipps).*



## A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.



Progress is being made with UK future farming schemes.

## Future farming schemes

July saw the official opening of applications for England's Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme, one of the replacements to the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

Scottish Government has launched its National Test programme designed to encourage awareness in environmental performance and efficiency on farm. In addition, it will design, test and improve methods adopted to support climate targets and biodiversity outcomes delivered.

Northern Ireland is still awaiting further detail on policy decisions from the Future Agricultural Policy. NSA is continuing to work with DAERA to ensure practical and financial support is available to the sheep industry in Northern Ireland.

There were also announcements from Welsh Government on its new Sustainable Farming Scheme, including additional policy news released at the Royal Welsh Show. *More information on page 18.*

## NI protocol bill

At the time of writing, the Northern Ireland (NI) protocol bill was sitting in the committee stage in the House of Commons.

The bill was introduced to ease the movement of goods between Great Britain and NI and unilaterally override parts of the Brexit withdrawal agreement governing this trade. It may take up to 12 months to go through parliament and there will be little to no change to existing controls in the meantime.



Post Brexit trade barriers are still causing headaches.

## Precision breeding bill

This new bill means plants, animals and feed that have undergone gene editing would no longer be classified as genetically modified (known in the regulation as 'precision bred organisms'), removing the regulatory requirements associated.

Experts in the field believe it could have significant benefits to the livestock industry, providing opportunities to target specific genes linked to diseases such as OPA or footrot. However, the Scottish and Welsh governments are not currently supportive of the move and the EU has not stated support, making NSA nervous as to the effect on EU trade if the bill goes ahead.

*More information on pages 22-23.*



NSA is still pushing for legislative change for ageing lambs at slaughter.

## Carcase splitting

In spring 2020, legislative change in the interpretation of ageing lambs was almost approved.

The current method of ageing sheep is the need to split carcasses and remove special risk material if a first set of permanent incisors has erupted. This is an imprecise system creating uncertainty for farmers and interpretation problems for processors.

Another casualty of Brexit, despite ministerial, Defra and Chief Veterinary Officer support, proposals to change the method of ageing to a set calendar date of 30th June following the year of birth were scuppered by the Food Standards Agency in 2020. NSA is pushing hard to get it back on the political agenda.

## Check movement data

NSA advises sheep keepers in England to check historic movements recorded with ARAMS, in the likely scenario the old movement database will be switched off in late September 2022.

The new Livestock Information Service (LIS) does not allow users to update incorrect historic movements, but the LIS bureau has been able to make amendments at the request of keepers, ahead of individual RPA inspections. It will not be able to do so once ARAMS is switched off.

NSA understands the facility to enter historic flock details as the starting point for a flock register in LIS is planned to be made available in late summer.



Changes to precision breeding definitions are still causing debate.

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For NSA Eastern Region (Rugby/Melton) and NSA South East Region (Thame) ram sales enquiries, please contact NSA Head Office using the details on page 1.

## NSA regional reports

## NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

**NSA Northern Ireland Region is now at the stage of encouraging members and all sheep farmers to get involved in the Northern Ireland Scab Initiative.**It has many benefits to those engaging, including on farm veterinary support and some treatment costs. NSA and other stakeholders hope this initiative will be supported and eventually eradicate scab outbreaks in Northern Ireland. *More details on page 17.*

## NSA Eastern Region

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

**NSA Eastern Region was privileged to enjoy a farm tour in June, across Sandringham Estate, courtesy of HRH The Queen.**

Livestock Manager Gordon Robinson led the inspiring tour, explaining his role since organic conversion and running a flock of 2,000 ewes and followers. Mr Robinson has since accepted an invitation to join our regional committee.

On Wednesday 21st September, there will be a farm walk courtesy of Nick Smith at Belvoir Estate, Leicestershire. Contact me directly to join.

This is heading towards being my last report as NSA Eastern Region Manager, as I shall step down at our Annual Regional Members Meeting, which will be on Wednesday 9th November at the Heathcourt Hotel, Newmarket, at 6pm.

## NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

**NSA Marches Region was pleased to meet with so many members at Sheep 2022.**

As the main NSA event of both the association as a whole and our region, it was good to have many regional members attend and volunteers support the event stewarding – thank you to all that helped. The region's next event will be a farm walk in autumn.

## NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

**Well, what a hot show the Royal Welsh was! But it was good to be back and welcome faces old and new to the NSA stand.**

Our reception was well supported on the Monday and the addition of workshops by Grow Wales Green and MSD, held in the NSA building during the week, were also welcome.

We introduced two new committee members at our last meeting – John Yeomans, to represent the Beulah Speckled Face Sheep Society, and Rhodri Manod Owen.

Thanks to all NSA Cymru/Wales Region members who helped at the recent NSA Sheep Event. It was much appreciated and got us back into the swing of things ahead of NSA Welsh Sheep next May.



Gareth Wyn Jones and Phil Stocker at the Royal Welsh Show.

Visitors were welcomed to the NSA marquee in a new location at this year's Royal Highland Show.

## NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

**NSA Scottish Region would like to thank all visitors, exhibitors, volunteers and contributors for their support this year at the Royal Highland Show.**

The region ran two competitions from its stand, in conjunction with the newly added seminars focusing on key topics such as animal health and welfare, the future of the flock and opportunities for young people in the sheep industry.

The NSA Scottish Region and Royal Highland &amp; Agricultural Society of Scotland lamb dressing competition was won by the very capable young team of Finlay Barclay (11), Zara Wood (13) and Katie Aiken (15). A stockjudging competition was also held, with the open class won by Jake Paler and the young farmer class won by Helen Forbes. Congratulations to all winners.

## NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

**The region came together for a productive committee meeting at Skipton Market in July.**

Plans were discussed for a visit and tour of British Wool's Bradford depot and Haworth scouring plant on Tuesday 6th September. Bookings can be made by contacting me direct. There are limited spaces so book to avoid disappointment. Plans are also in place to hold a farm walk later in the autumn.

It was really great to meet with so many members at the Great Yorkshire Show and to sponsor the senior shearing competition. There was a real buzz around the NSA tent with many visitors expressing interest in NSA North Sheep 2023.

## NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

**It's hard to believe we're more than halfway through 2022 with so many achievements by our region already.**

The launch of the long-awaited, interactive Field Days across the region in June was a great success – see page 12.

Regional Chairman Yann Le Du, committee member Les Morris and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Clover Crosse manned the NSA stand at the Organic Farmers and Growers conference in July, with NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker attending the event to partake in a debate.

Thoughts now turn to the region's inaugural ram sale on Friday 2nd September at Thame Market. We hope to see many members there and look forward to attracting a good number of quality rams for buyers to bid on.

## NSA Central Region

By Alice Helliwell, Manager

**Members of NSA Central Region attended their first show in a few years in late July, Bakewell County Festival.**

Events such as these are always enjoyable and give us an opportunity to highlight the importance of the sheep industry to the public.

Following on from this, the region will be sponsoring showing classes at Hope Show, Derbyshire, on Monday 29th August. It's a great show with ever-growing sheep numbers. We hope to see many members there.



NSA South West Region hosted Defra to discuss the SFI.

## NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

**Several members of NSA South West Region attended a farm visit courtesy of Bryan and Liz Griffiths to meet with Janet Hughes, Defra Future Farming Director, as part of an ongoing engagement between NSA and Defra.**

The farm visit at Umberleigh, Devon, enabled participants to see how Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilots are progressing and to discuss any concerns. As SFI and the other government schemes develop, it is important we remain as engaged as possible to ensure they are attainable and fit as well as possible into farming businesses.

Our next event will be a farm walk in late summer.

NSA Sheep Event returned to the Three Counties Showground in the shadow of the beautiful Malvern Hills.

# NSA Sheep Event 2022 attracts crowds looking towards a positive future

## MAJOR EVENT SPONSORS



Opening its gates for the first time in four years, NSA Sheep 2022 drew crowds from across the UK to enjoy a fantastic day out at the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.

Focusing on a positive future for the sector, the association's flagship event attracted prominent names from industry to lead seminar discussions and pass on valuable experience in practical workshops.

The event also welcomed Defra Minister Victoria Prentis who spoke at the event about the future of sheep farming in the UK, as well as her Defra team who shared useful information on future farming schemes.

In a welcome address for the event, NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker called for sheep farming to be recognised for all it delivers – not least for its incredible interconnectedness and multifunctionality.

Speaking specifically about the risk of 'silo thinking' by policymakers, he said: "We encouragingly hear talk of land-sharing being the ideal – but then go on to talk about payments for farms to take land out of production."

## Threats

"We still hear that less productive land should become habitat land, without recognising that habitat for butterflies, birds and much more comes from the farming system, not from land set aside for nature. We continue to face a serious threat that 'it makes sense' for lower quality, cheaper agricultural land (mainly grassland) to be destined for tree planting and habitat creation – damaging a truly multifunctional farming system and swapping it for something that negatively changes the landscape, ecology, rural communities and culture forever," he added.

Janet Hughes, Defra's Programme Director for the Future Farming & Countryside Programme, and Jonathan Statham, Animal Health & Welfare Board for England Chair, joined Mr Stocker for the welcome address.

Professor Statham echoed the sentiment. He said: "The multi-functional nature of what we do supports the balanced outcomes we need to achieve for both food security and the environment. Maintaining and developing

our high standards of health and welfare through the new Animal Health & Welfare Pathway sits alongside the drive to deliver a balance that ultimately links animals with human health and the environment in a genuine 'one health' approach."

With workshops at the event about the Pathway, which will be a smaller funding stream available alongside the larger Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), future farming support was a clear theme at NSA Sheep 2022 – and one that was picked up again when Minister Prentis addressed event crowds.

"While I am Farming Minister I will advocate for the best support for farming," she pledged.

Minister Prentis encouraged farmers to be proactive in taking up such schemes, making it clear that now was the time to accept SFI was the new offering (alongside similar schemes in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), rather than taking a 'wait and see' approach.

## Promoting produce

She also urged lamb producers to be vocal about their work, both through general farming practices and participation in new schemes. She said: "There is an obligation on British farmers to reach beyond the farm gate when promoting the high standards and quality of British food."

This came with a warning about what might happen if the UK sees a change of government at the new election. Minister Prentis added: "Without the EU and CAP regulation, there is no guarantee from future governments on farming or farming support."



NSA Chairman Phil Stocker welcomed visitors to the event.



Defra Minister Victoria Prentis spoke at the event.

The reference to a general election was tied up in comments about the ongoing Conservative Party leadership race – something Mr Stocker particularly picked up on from Minister Prentis's address.

Speaking after the event, he said: "On many issues covered by Minister Prentis, through her speech and her responses to various questions, it was made clear the Government is struggling to progress real issues impacting agriculture due to the internal Government turmoil."

## Brexit legacy

"In addition, although we may well have left the EU, I cannot agree that 'Brexit is done'. The relationship between this Government and the EU is making negotiations tough. And it is evident there is little power to address issues with the live animal Border Control Posts in France, or the contentious Northern Ireland Protocol to ease trading relations.

"NSA is concerned the lack of stability and continuity within the current Government will lead to more uncertainty and a lack of ability to make good decisions with inadequate consideration of the food and farming sector – an example being the lack of proper parliamentary scrutiny on the Australia free trade agreement," he said.

Minister Prentis also raised the issue of food security in her address, saying it was top of the global agenda and was now being thought of as a national security issue for the UK. As such, she said, it was 'never 10 minutes from my mind'.

Mr Stocker responded: "It was encouraging to hear the Minister state her recognition of the importance of food, food security and the farming sector. I share her views that, as a farming industry, we need to constantly do more to think, reach and act beyond the farm gate, and there is a strong case to be made that the success of our future farming schemes, and funding for

agriculture, will be best achieved by farmers engaging with schemes – particularly when there is a keenness to make them work for farmers."

## Attractions

Away from the event formalities, crowds enjoyed the vast array of attractions around the showground. Many took the opportunity to speak with the numerous agricultural trade stands to learn about the latest products and innovations to benefit their sheep farming businesses, while others hoped to upskill themselves by watching demonstrations or taking part in practical workshops.

The Asda and Dunbia cookery theatre was a popular destination for those looking to the use of lamb beyond the farm gate. NSA Love Lamb Ambassadors Ernie Richards and Amy Matravers were joined by local young farmers clubs to share recipe ideas.



Attractions at Sheep Event 2022 drew huge volumes of visitors.



The top price sheepdog with vendor A. Games (left) and highest bidder C. V. Yapp.

In the main ring, the popular sheepdog demonstration and sale took place, run by auctioneers Clee, Tompkinson & Francis. With quality, well trained dogs on offer the top price went to vendor Aaron James of Crickhowell, Powys. He sold Sam for 2,800gns to Mr C.V. Yapp of Cleeton St. Mary, Shropshire. The average price for dogs sold was 1,740gns.

Summarising the day as a whole, NSA and Event Chairman Dan Phipps said: "What a fantastic day! It was so good to welcome back visitors, who created a real buzz around the showground. Thanks go to all involved in the organisation of such a valued industry event – and to the event sponsors and exhibitors, which make the event an essential date in the diary of the nation's sheep farmers."

*NSA Sheep 2024 will be on Tuesday 30th July 2024, again at the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.*

# NSA Sheep Event sparks interest from across the globe



Showing international appeal, NSA was pleased to host visitors from more than 10 countries at this year's NSA Sheep Event.

With worldwide trade now a key part of the UK's trade strategy following its departure from the EU, the opportunity to welcome guests from nations including the USA, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Germany and the Republic of Ireland gave NSA and other industry partners chance to showcase the UK sector and demonstrated the global interest in it.



International groups included a delegation of farmers, vets and consultants from Turkey.

## Visits

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "NSA Sheep Event has always attracted international visitors but this year there was a concerted effort to co-ordinate visits to the UK – in line with the UK's aspiration to increase our trade opportunities across the world."

Working with other industry bodies leading export related work, including AHDB, the Department of International Trade, UKTAG and farmers themselves, NSA is confident the event created the perfect platform to highlight the quality of both UK sheep meat and genetics to the international guests.

Mr Stocker continues: "This valuable opportunity to promote future trade was crucial but, in addition, the chance to strengthen general relationships with other sheep-producing nations was equally important.

"NSA is already working in a number of areas to establish more of a 'global sheep community'

to share technical and farm development information. In particular, NSA recently hosted a number of exchange visits with European countries and has been central to creating the Global Sheep Producers Forum, working together on reputational and next generation initiatives."

## Lamb tasting

Among activities at the NSA Sheep Event was a session led by AHDB for a delegation of US visitors who enjoyed tastings of lamb and mutton from a range of native sheep breeds. Alongside this, UKTAG and NSA, supported by the Department of International Trade, hosted a large group of industry players from South American countries for a week's visit incorporating the event and generating much interest in UK farming systems and products.

The issue of global trade was also raised in the busy seminar tent at the event, where discussions included the topic of the UK's diverse market opportunities.

Over four seminars throughout the day, with standing room only in each, visitors were also able to join debates on the important role of grasslands in carbon capture and nature recovery, sheep farmer's responsibility as a force for social good, and the issue of responding to change to meet future sheep farming challenges.

The event workshop areas provided platforms for discussion and learning, as event sponsors and other industry supporters led interactive sessions passing on practical advice to farmers. Creating a lot of interest was a demonstration on sheep post-mortems, reminding those joining the workshop a dead sheep should never be wasted and will always provide an opportunity to learn.

*For the first time all seminars at the event were recorded. Watch online at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars).*

## Workshop topics

- Live post-mortems.
- Vaccination tips.
- Forage, mineral and trace element analysis.
- Reducing antibiotic use.
- Accessing Sustainable Farming Incentive and Animal Health & Welfare Pathway funding.
- Multi-species grass swards.
- Sheep scab best practice.
- Using genetics for flock progress.

*Workshops were sponsored by Agri-Lloyd, Bimedia, Defra, Elanco Animal Health, Germinal, Innovis and MSD Animal Health.*



There was standing room only in the seminar tent.

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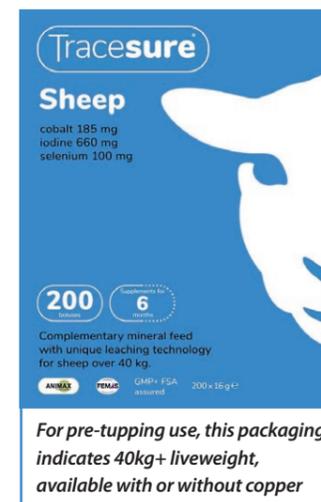
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Competitions enabled farmers, both young and old to display their skills.



# Sheep farming skills on display in event competitions



Skilled young shepherds, the finest fleeces and innovative product ideas were all put to the test at NSA Sheep 2022, as the varied array of competitions allowed many sectors of the sheep industry to be showcased.

The highlight was the final of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. Having qualified at NSA regional heats, 18 competitors from across the UK were put through their paces in six shepherding challenges.

Scoring the most points across the board and taking the prestigious title plus £1,000

prize money was 26-year-old Cameron Farnan from Stowmarket, Suffolk (NSA Eastern Region). Cameron is a self-employed shepherd and also an NSA Next Generation Ambassador.

## Young shepherds

Cameron says: "It was a surprise to win, as competition was fierce. I thoroughly enjoyed the day. It was a great learning opportunity as well as a chance to compete. The atmosphere was so positive and friendly among the other very skilled young shepherds."

Close behind on the scoresheet was 25-year-old Clover Crosse from Wiltshire (NSA South East Region) in second place, with 26-year-old Thomas

Watson from County Durham (NSA Northern Region) picking up third place. Taking first prize for the highest placed under 21 competitor was 20-year-old Thomas Garlick from Herefordshire (NSA Marches Region).

Elsewhere on the showground another hard-fought contest took place as teams of fencing specialists competed in the Tornado wire fencing competition, requiring a section of stock fencing to be erected to a professional standard in just three hours.

The winner of this test of speed, skill and stamina, which highlights the benefit of using professional fencing contractors for livestock fencing, was M.J. Fencing of Leominster, Herefordshire, previous winner of the title at the past two NSA Sheep Events.

## New competitions

Away from the busy activity in the shepherding and fencing areas, competitions were also held to identify the most skilled carcase graders, the top quality fleece and – in new event elements for 2022 – the best on-farm and trade inventions for the sheep sector, and a Young Farmers Club team shearing competition.

The inventions competition followed a similar format to that of popular contests at agricultural events in the southern hemisphere, showcasing both commercial companies' and farmer visitors' ideas and creations to ease any aspect of practical sheep farming.

## Competition results

- **Best stands**  
McVeigh Parker & Co (outside), AHDB (inside), Texel Sheep Society (breed society) and Texel Sheep Society (best pen on sheep on a stand).
- **Carcase selection, sponsored by Hallmark/Kepak**  
Tomos Glyn Davies & Len Pryon, Denbigh, Denbighshire.
- **NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year, sponsored by the Texel Sheep Society**  
Cameron Farnan, NSA Eastern Region.  
**Highest placed under 21**  
Thomas Garlick, NSA Marches Region.
- **Tornado Wire Fencing**  
M.J. Evans Fencing, Leominster.
- **Inventions, sponsored by Rappa**  
Eadie Bros with the Lamb Castration Clip with ClipFitter (trade) and Robert Laird with a Rollover Crate (farmer).
- **NFYFC Team Shearing**  
Luke & Ross Parkhouse, NSA South West Region (junior), Tom Hadley & Joe Pritchard, NSA Marches Region (senior and overall).
- **Fleeces, judged by British Wool**  
Miss Y. Hoskins, Woolaston, Gloucestershire (champion) and Mr E. Owen, Llanddoged, Denbighshire (reserve).

NSA thanks all event sponsors and stewards, including those for the competitions.

From several interesting ideas, the winner of the farmer section was Robert Laird, Biggar, Lanarkshire, who had designed a homemade rollover crate for easing sheep handling. Also from north of the border, Eadie Bros of Selkirk in the Scottish Borders won the section for commercial companies – see page 52.

## Lucky dip

Ensuring everyone attending the event had a chance to go home a winner, the NSA Sheep Lucky Dip prize draw attracted interest throughout the day. On the NSA stand visitors tried their luck to win prizes generously gifted by event sponsors and exhibitors. Simply by selecting a sheep eartag, kindly supplied by Shearwell, out of the tombola drum, visitors had the chance to win big or small with some lucky and very happy visitors taking home rewards ranging from mugs to mineral drenches, and even a pedigree ewe lamb.  
*More at [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk).*



The Texel Sheep Society picked up both the best pen of sheep and best sheep society stand awards.



Fleece competition judged by Billy Hewitson, British Wool.



Miss Hoskins receiving her award from British Wool and NSA Sheep Event Organiser Helen Roberts.



Tornado wire fencing competition winners.



Testing speed, skill and stamina in the fencing competition.



Young farmers club team shearing competition.



Visitors took part in the NSA Sheep Lucky Dip.



Congratulations to NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition winners.

## Top farm visit for NSA AGM

NSA enjoyed an exceptional farm walk as part of its AGM this year, with officeholders and members hosted by Alun and Helen Bennett in mid-Wales in early August.

Alun and Helen established their family's Plasucha Lleyen flock at Doladron Farm and Tyncoed, Meifod, Powys, more than 25 years ago.

Since then, the successful Lleyen flock has been joined by several other breeds as the family meets demand for quality genetics across Wales and further afield.

Helen says: "Our aim is to breed quality livestock. A high percentage of all our females are sold for breeding. We try to produce quality breeding animals ensuring no wastage from the farm."

Visitors to the NSA AGM enjoyed a walk at the farm, viewing some of the family's 600 Lleyen ewes, 250 Hill-Type North Country Cheviots and small flocks of pedigree Texel and Bluefaced Leicester.

"We were honoured to be asked to host the farm tour following the AGM. Our system is spread over several sites but we tried to ensure a good selection of sheep were available for those attending to view," Helen comments.

Ewes at Doladron are bred both pure and also crossed with Bluefaced Leicester rams to produce Mules. A particular market the Bennetts are

filling well is that of recipient ewes for embryo transfer, as all stock is maedi visna accredited. All Lleyen and Cheviot ewe lambs are also put to Bluefaced Leicester rams, lambing outside from April until mid-May.

The Lleyen and Cheviot ewes scan at more than 180% and Alun and Helen have plans to increase Cheviot numbers. Alun comments: "The Cheviot is a wonderful ewe. They scan well, don't receive any concentrate feed and lamb very well. We've also found demand for them to be growing."

### Quality stock

While producing breeding animals is the main focus for the family, production of quality finished lambs is also an important part of the enterprise. All stock is finished and then sold at Welshpool or Oswestry market.

The quality of the farm's stock has been recognised with awards including, most recently, the All Wales Hill-Type North Country Cheviot flock competition in 2021. "We were also really pleased to win the All-Wales Texel flock competition at the Royal Welsh show this year," adds son Robert.

Having completed a successful show season, including wins for homebred Texel ewe lambs at both the Royal Highland and Royal Welsh shows, attention now turns to ram sales.

Alun explains: "We have selected the very best 50 Cheviot, Lleyen and Bluefaced Leicester rams



AGM hosts Alun and Helen Bennett.

that we will be offering for sale as yearlings. They are now getting just a little feed to get them in top sale condition. We also sell around 75 pedigree Texel ram lambs each year through ram sales and private sales direct from farm. Our sale season for them starts at Lanark, moving to Welshpool, Worcester and Carlisle."

As NSA members, Alun and Helen culminate the ram sale season at the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale at Builth Wells.

Helen says: "We have been NSA members for many years. NSA represents us very well as an industry. We need a voice for our sector, and the chance to sell at the Builth sale is also a benefit."

"We feel the people within NSA working to represent us are good and clearly passionate about the future of the sheep industry."

## Field Days a success

Under scorching sunshine, NSA South East Region held a new-style event in June offering sheep farmers the chance to take part in an insightful, hands on knowledge exchange day.

Over three consecutive days at three separate farm locations, in Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Kent, the Field Days brought together farmers and members of the supply trade for a series of interactive demonstrations.

### Exhibitions

Each session focussed on the health and wellbeing of sheep flocks, incorporating latest technologies and demonstrating best practice. With the emphasis placed on audience participation, the interactive nature of the days used sheep from each of the host farms in live demonstrations.

NSA South East Region Chairman Yann Le Du explains: "The interactive nature of the Field Days was well received by all those involved, from the major sponsors to the allied trades and, most importantly, by the farmer participants. It is a format the region will build on for future events, looking



Innovative Field Days facilitated knowledge exchange.

to apply it to a range of different subject matters. We would like to thank all those involved throughout the planning and running of these events."

With attendees split in to four smaller groups to allow maximum discussion, the groups rotated around four training demonstrations covering the safe and effective treatment of sheep scab, blowfly control, sheep handling and data collection systems, and practical tips to get the most from sheep vaccination.

Field Day major event sponsors were Bimeda, Elanco, MSD and Rappa with Datamars Livestock.

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# Early NSA Built sale exceeds expectations

The NSA Wales & Border Early Sale saw a top price of 1,700gns for a Charollais ram, a yearling Texel sold for 1,600gns and a Suffolk for 850gns, defying fears that rising input costs would curb bidding.

A total of 243 sheep were sold, 73% of the number forward, turnover was up on last year and the top price 100gns high than 2021.

Graham Jones, NSA Wales & Border Chairman, was pleased with the day's trading. He said: "As long as sheep had a good shape and a bit of power, they seemed to be selling. I think buyers were selective and I fancy sheep weren't quite as forward as they might have been in other years – possibly because of the price of feed and the grass situation. But good sheep sold well and it was a very satisfactory sale."

## Star quality

The highest priced ram was a 1,700gns Charollais shearling from Colin Bowen's Gwyndy flock in Pembrokeshire. Mr Bowen said he was out of Wernfawr Vinnie and had shown star quality from birth. He sold to Gareth Bickerton, who runs the Lleiriog Flock of pedigree Charollais at Lloran Uchaf, Llansilin, Powys.

Describing his purchase, Mr Bickerton said: "He's a good allrounder with plenty of power and bone combined with a good carcass and good skin."

Robert and Nesta Watkins' Corras flock sold a Texel shearling to R.A. Williams of Laugharne, Carmarthenshire at 1,600gns. Out of Clun Captain, Corras Elmo took first prize and reserve champion in the pre-sale show.

"It was a sticky sale, with people only going for the best. But a good ram is your cheapest input in a time when costs are affecting everything," Mr Watkins said.

On his first outing to the NSA Early Sale, James Vaughan of Vaughan Farms, Herefordshire, secured the overall Texel championship with a



Top price was 1,700gns for a Charollais shearling from Colin Bowen of Pembrokeshire.

shearling ewe that went on to sell for 1,100gns. The supreme Charollais champion was a shearling ram from Adrian and Rhian Davies' Glyncoch flock, selling for 1,300gns.

## Suffolk top

The highest priced Suffolk went for 850gns and was sold by Paul Curran of Talgarth, Powys. He also got the highest ram lamb price – 1,000gns for a Charollais that won first prize in its class and reserve overall champion.

Jonathan and Janet Corbett sold 15 MV-accredited recipient Suffolk ewes for 200gns and 202gns to Gethin Mathias of Pumpsaint, Carmarthenshire, who himself sold two Beltex rams for 500gns and 400gns. The Beltex top price was 1,000gns.

*Sale averages and more information at [www.nsaramsales.co.uk](http://www.nsaramsales.co.uk).*

# All systems go for NSA sales

Depending on when this magazine reaches you, there may still be time to head to the NSA South West Region Ram Sale at Exeter Livestock Centre, Devon.

The sale on Wednesday 17th August is an excellent multi-breed sale for males and females, with the usual NSA inspection process in place.

Hot on its heels will be the NSA Eastern Region Rugby Sale, with up to 130 rams (mainly Texel, Charollais and Suffolk) sold on the afternoon of Friday 26th August.

A new addition to the calendar is the NSA South East Region Ram Sale, incorporated into the Thame Farmers Market Breeding Ewe Sale on Friday 2nd September.

James Goffin, Sale Committee Chairman, says: "As a committee, we are very excited for the sale and extremely grateful to Thame Mart for fully getting behind the plan. The sale will be a great showcase of stock from across South East England."

The NSA Eastern Region Melton Mowbray Ram Sale will be part of the Melton Midlands Sheep Fair, an event the mart has grown significantly in recent years. Don't miss the action on Friday 22nd September.

## Renowned

Then the season culminates with the renowned NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale at the Royal Welsh Showground on Monday 25th September.

Graham Jones, NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman, says: "We're looking forward to getting Built back to normal, with a good selection



Builth Wells, Exeter, Melton Mowbray, Rugby and Thame will host NSA sales

of tups on which we can bid with confidence, knowing they have been scrutinised by a team of inspectors who know the sheep industry."

Changes this year will see newly located sale rings for the Bluefaced Leicesters, Cheviots and hill breeds – in part to make space for holding pens so people buying multiple rams can bring a vehicle onto the showground and load up, leaving the tup taxis to cater for purchasers with only one or two rams to move. Parking will be on the horse hill, with a golf buggy shuttle service available for the less able.

# Buy and sell the best at an NSA Ram Sale



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

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

Sheep with performance recording records are available and clearly marked in the catalogue.

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

Different breeds and vendors are brought together in one place, offering sheep from all UK environments to suit various markets.

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

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

## NSA Ram Sales 2022

### NSA South West Ram Sale

Wednesday 17th August – Exeter Livestock Centre

### NSA Eastern Region Rugby Sale

Friday 26th August – Rugby Farmers Mart

### Thame Farmers Market second breeding sheep sale incorporating the inaugural NSA South East Region Ram Sale

Friday 2nd September – Thame Market

### Melton Midlands Sheep Fair

#### incorporating the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale

Friday 16th September – Melton Mowbray Market

### NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale

Monday 19th September – Builth Wells

[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/ram-sales](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/ram-sales)

See page 4 for contact details of our Ram Sales Organisers.



# Tree planting still high on Welsh Government agenda

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Welsh Government has published proposals for its new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), which promises to support farm businesses in lowering their carbon footprints, help improve the environment and support the production of food in a sustainable way.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is continuing to play an active role in engaging with Welsh Government and ensuring any future schemes deliver for farming in a practical way, and ensure they provide for rural communities, recognise the particular needs of family farms, and acknowledge ecologically sustainable, local food production.



Welsh Government is proposing 10% tree cover target per farm.

at the expense of farming and food production and takes into account hedges, coppices, shelter belts and woodland already part of the farming landscape.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is continuing to work collaboratively with British Wool to ensure value and demand for wool continues to increase. With recent announcements of the fleece trade recovering from rock-bottom

rates during the pandemic. It is encouraging to see continued innovation across the wider industry to promote the true value of wool.

## Scab priorities

A Welsh sheep scab stakeholder group, on which NSA Cymru/Wales Region holds a seat, aims to pool ideas and resources to target scab, successfully setting some priorities around prevention, testing and treatment and environmental issues at its last meeting. Guidance from Welsh Government on its future control programme is due, but information so far about engagement and communication appears positive. We understand it will use SCOPS industry best practice as the basis.

## Tree targets

Tree planting was also included in the outline proposals for SFS, specifying a requirement to have at least 10% tree cover per farm as a universal action. NSA has continued engagement with policymakers to ensure this target doesn't come

# Policy, sheep health and land access

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



While members are busy with the day-to-day challenges of filling the sheds with crops for winter and mitigating increased input prices, there are policy changes on the horizon – not to mention another proposed independence referendum.

Scottish Government is consulting on Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy, looking at how the biodiversity crisis can be diminished via a new strategy to 'drive transformation'.

NSA Scottish Region will respond as part of a collaborative effort by the Scottish Red Meat Resilience Group. There is an open consultation ahead of the next Land Reform Bill, which seeks to make changes to the framework of law and policy that governs the system of ownership, management and use of land in Scotland. Ultimately this comes down to the vision of a net zero Scotland with thriving (and growing) rural and island communities, where more, not less, people live and work sustainably on the land.

NSA Scottish Region will be discussing this at length within the membership and with industry stakeholders, to ensure a rounded response for the 25th September 2022 closing date.

## Disease focus

The ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA) working group chaired by NSA Scottish Region has been active. Dr Chris Cousens gave a presentation on the work of Moredun, suggesting that while the recorded incidence rate is less than five in a million sheep, it is more likely 1% of the sheep

population. Independent vet specialist Dr Phil Scott reported on his extensive OPA screening work, scanning up to 15,000 sheep a year, with those deemed to have OPA undergoing post-mortem examination. The meeting discussed the need for scanning and training certification of vets, further awareness by vets, and improved research and diagnostic provisions.

## Access rights

NSA Scottish Region continues as a corresponding member of the National Access Forum, which was established by NatureScot to advise on national issues linked to Scottish access rights. While the prevalence of sheep worrying seems to have reduced since the coronavirus lockdown, it is recognised that any incident is one too many, no matter the severity.

NSA will continue to support those who are affected by sheep worrying by dogs and other access-related issues, and continue to raise awareness at all levels of the consequences of irresponsible access. Should any member encounter any issues relating to this subject and need support, please do not hesitate to make contact.



# Balanced support sought for Northern Ireland sheep sector

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Summer recess in July means there is little activity in the agricultural department – but as we enter August things will resume.

The Future of Agriculture policy document has been published here in Northern Ireland (NI). Unfortunately, there was little mention of the sheep sector compared to the suckler cow and beef sector. NSA has shared its concerns with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and, working with the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU), will continue to seek similar assurances for the sheep sector.

## Support areas

DAERA has recognised the vulnerability of the sheep sector but, lacking steadfast solutions, has assured NSA it will continue to collaborate to find an equitable way forward and support the vitally important work of the NI sheep sector.

NSA has secured a joint meeting in August with DAERA and UFU to discuss this further and push for a better approach. Areas to target as a suitable and sensible resolution include agri-environment approaches sheep farmers can integrate into their systems, pushing flocks forward through genetic

work, capitalising on data collection, and/or furthering health and welfare.

NSA is confident a workable solution can be found for the sheep industry, but finding a process that is not too cumbersome and labour intensive for DAERA is key to a favourable conclusion.

## Scab initiative

The NI Scab Initiative has finally received the go ahead and several farmer meetings will take place in August ahead of farm visits in September. Sheep scab is a notifiable disease in NI and this may make some folk nervous about engaging with the scheme. But NSA encourages them to do so and assures members that it is working with DAERA to make the administration as light touch as possible, with rapid removal of restrictions once treatment is administered.



Sheep scab eradication is the aim in NI.



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The land sharing approach presents some concerns.

# Opportunities and threats in new Welsh Sustainable Farming scheme

The long-anticipated Welsh Government Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) offers promising commitments for Welsh Agriculture, such as a priority to keep farmers on the land.

But NSA is concerned this 'land sharing' approach makes little commitment to ensuring productivity or providing food security for Wales.

Following the publication of Sustainable Farming and Our Land (2019) and the Agriculture (Wales) White Paper (2020), Welsh Government set out proposals on how it would provide the long-term framework for future agricultural policy and support.

The Agriculture (Wales) Bill will be introduced to the Senedd later this year and will ensure Welsh Ministers have the powers they need to support producers to deliver on sustainability.

## Priorities

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "NSA is pleased to see the recognition of key priorities, including the overarching commitment to keep farmers on the land, but the proposals are lacking depth and there is little to suggest production of high-quality food is high up the agenda. The scheme proposals also negate to mention rural communities or rural businesses and fail to acknowledge agriculture as a key contributor to the long-term survival of the Welsh language."

Although there will be a range of actions for farmers to undertake, any options must have a

clear connection to agreed outcomes, such as animal health and welfare, maximising carbon storage, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, mitigating flood and drought risk, enhancing engagement and resource efficiency.

To ensure engagement and increased adoption of sustainable practices, Welsh Government is aiming to focus on knowledge exchange, utilising Farming Connect as a vehicle for continued professional development. Farming Connect will provide advice and guidance to move toward sustainable farming practices, including completing self-assessments, making improvements and benchmarking.

## Transition

Engagement will be done through surveys, workshops and other methods to assess feasibility during the transition. Stability payments (see panel) will continue to be a feature of the SFS during and beyond this Senedd term.

The next phase of co-design forms part of an ongoing process of engagement with farmers and industry representatives, the outcomes of which will lead to a final consultation and transition in spring 2023.

Helen Roberts, NSA Cymru/Wales Region Development Officer, says: "NSA is increasingly concerned as to how smaller enterprises, new entrants, tenants and graziers might fare in the schemes to come. Although there is appetite from Welsh Government for co-design, it is vital these groups are represented to the best of industry's ability as they are essential for supporting rural communities, businesses and livelihood."

The full scheme is set to launch in 2025. NSA will continue to work collaboratively with Welsh Government to ensure there is practical support for sheep farmers across Wales.



Welsh Government acknowledges the importance of guidance and support.

## SFS national minimum standard

As part of the SFS, a national minimum standard will be introduced, a consolidation of legal requirements already in place under cross compliance.

Options to secure farm support payments by going above and beyond this will include:

- Universal, baseline payment.
- Optional, higher-level actions.
- Collaborative, specific priority actions.

Welsh Government says it will work with Plaid Cymru to introduce a transition period as the system of farm payments is reformed.

Mmmm



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# Public procurement takes front stage as food security moves up agenda

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

Recent political and consumer focus has been on net zero targets, overcoming climate change challenges and boosting nature recovery.

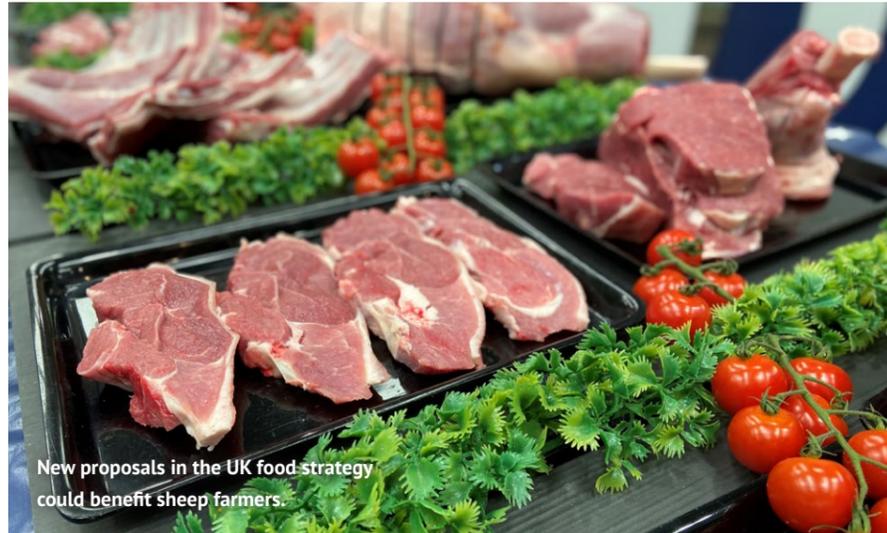
But the publication of the UK food strategy in June introduced an element to the debate that NSA and its members have highlighted for many years – food security and the challenge of feeding a growing population.

The long-awaited food strategy promises to deliver a prosperous agri-food sector and ensure secure food supply in an unpredictable world. It pledges £270m investment in technology and local supply chains. The next step is a delivery framework, detailing how the Government proposes to help farmers produce more food while meeting nature recovery and climate change targets.

Of particular interest are proposed changes to make public sector catering policies more secure. Procurement in this area has historically taken large volumes of imported product, including lamb. If this is converted to local sourcing, it could go some way to protecting the sheep sector from recently agreed free trade agreements.

## Objective

The headline ambition is to ensure 50% of public sector food spend goes on food produced locally or certified to higher standards. A policy consultation also sets out objectives for promoting procurement of local, sustainable, healthier food, improved transparency within food supply chains, opening public sector supply chains to small and medium sized enterprises



New proposals in the UK food strategy could benefit sheep farmers.

in the aim to support local economies, boosting resilience and encouraging innovation.

One of the main hurdles in achieving the ambitions set out by the Government is the loss of small local abattoirs. With small abattoirs on the decline, how will we service increased local demand? The red meat sector had a taste of this during the pandemic when there was sudden surge in demand for locally sourced produce. The small abattoir network recorded a 10% increase in production, indicating they are a critical component in sustainable food sourcing.

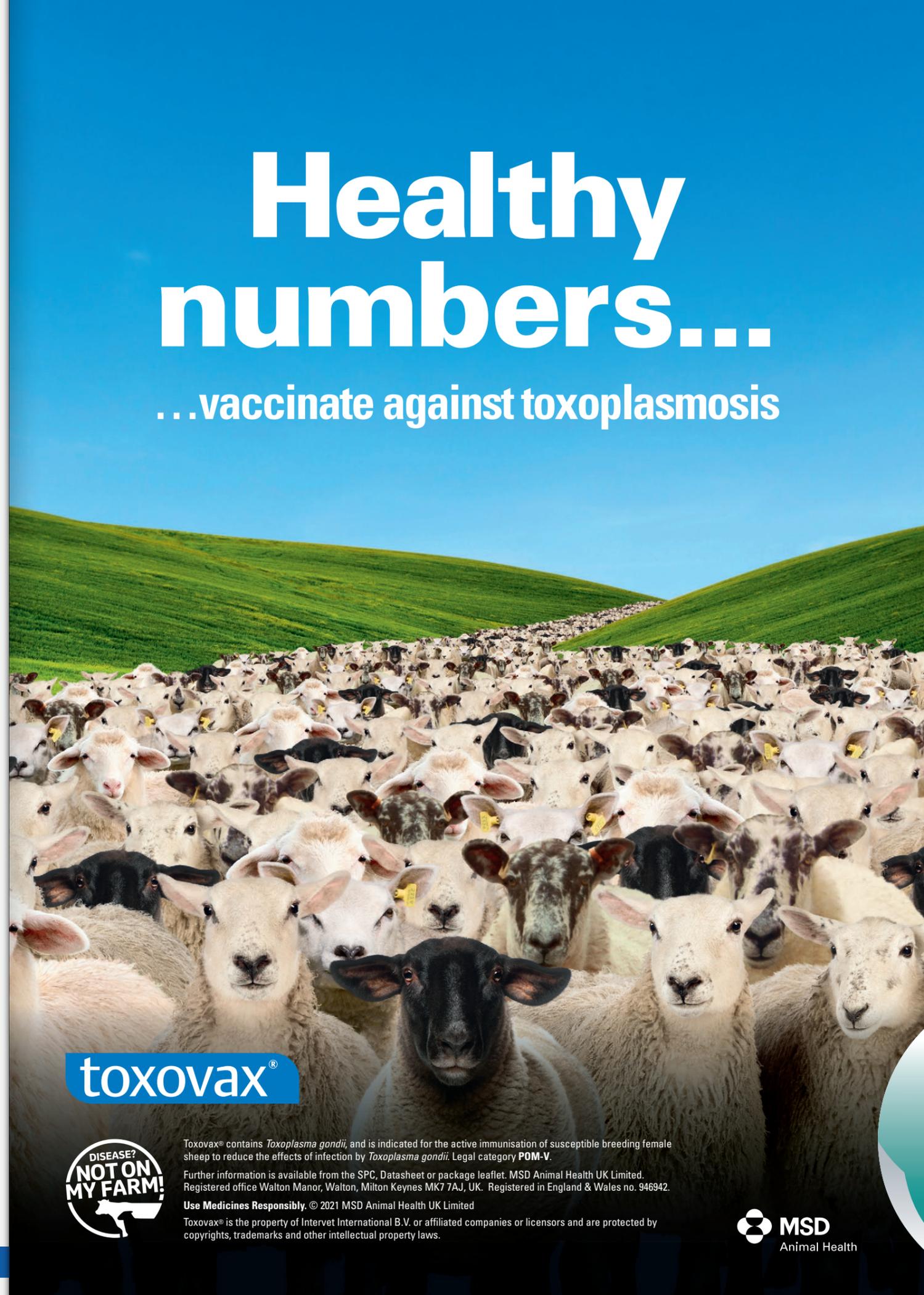
But that was not a one-off occurrence. Over the last few years, there has been a rapid rise in consumer awareness of sustainability, with the demand for local, traceable produce rising. High animal welfare standards are also on the consumer agenda, integrated into the wider desire to address issues of climate

change, biodiversity decline and environmental degradation.

## Local abattoirs

NSA is not alone in believing local and smaller abattoirs support different business models for farmers, enabling them to diversify and maximise returns and carcase utilisation. This boosts local economies and delivers longer chains of return to small businesses. Smaller abattoirs, however, have struggled to invest in their businesses up to this point and have not been able to access most of the funding pots available to large-scale operators.

This consultation could pave the way for a prosperous aspect of the domestic red meat sector – and has the potential to bolster productivity, production and even flock numbers, if the infrastructure from farm to plate is put in place.



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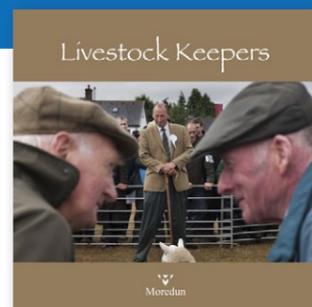


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## What's the latest from Moredun?

Moredun has released *Livestock Keepers*, a beautiful hardback book showcasing rural life through powerful imagery and stories straight from the keepers themselves.

Buy a copy at [www.moredun.org.uk/shop/books/livestock-keepers](http://www.moredun.org.uk/shop/books/livestock-keepers). All proceeds go towards supporting the Scottish livestock industry.





Selecting stock with low methane emitting genes could help meet net zero targets.

## Genetic modification v. precision breeding – useful differentiation or a risk to trade?

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

While genetic modification and ‘Frankenstein farming’ have grabbed negative headlines for agriculture, the field of precision breeding is far more complex – and potentially relevant to the UK sheep sector.

Once you look past the assumption that all work in this area is genetic modification, there are certain precision breeding techniques that have the potential to help farming sectors adapt to climate change, reduce disease, enhance sustainability, and improve the resilience of agricultural systems.

Precision-bred organisms are defined as plants or animals that have been genetically modified through the use of modern technology, where the modification could have occurred using traditional processes, such as selective breeding.

### Proposals

Proposed changes to the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill, introduced to the House of Commons in May, would update the existing genetically modified organisms (GMO) regulation, classifying an organism as a GMO only when its genetic material has been altered in way that does not occur naturally.

The current legislation, which could not be changed while the UK was part of the EU, does not distinguish between instances where the genetic modification could have been produced using traditional processes (gene editing) and where it couldn't (genetic modification).

The proposed change applies only to England. While the Secretary of State has written to the devolved nations to encourage them to follow suit, Scotland and Wales do not appear willing, and Northern Ireland is unable to adopt changes as it is legally bound by EU law.

The recently formed UK Genetics for Livestock and Equines (UKGLE) Committee (previously the Farm Animal Genetic Resources Committee, FAnGR) has an overarching ambition to identify opportunities to capture value from the genetic variation in livestock species more effectively, with a focus on applications to enhance production efficiency and minimise environmental footprint, while maintaining high levels of animal health and welfare.



NSA is concerned changes to gene editing regulations would affect critical EU trade.

The committee also continues to advise on breed conservation and sustainable use. It recognises much of the UK's success to production in challenging geographical landscapes is underpinned by a wide diversity of livestock breeds and breed crosses well adapted to different production environments – a result of many decades of selective breeding.

The diversity in genetics, ability to utilise different feed types and to thrive in varied environments, particularly amongst our native breeds, allows us to make highly efficient use of the land and resources available, adapt to emerging environmental and disease challenges, and to remain highly competitive in a large global market.

The global sheep industry has already begun selecting sheep for lower methane emissions,

in line with COP 26 commitments to reduce greenhouse gas concentrations, with this new development reaching UK shores at an R&D level.

Although rising to the sustainability challenge and embracing new technologies such as precision breeding might be key to meeting the UK Government's aspirations, for the sheep sector we are left with the question of trade. The EU is by far the largest importer of UK sheep meat and, under current regulation, does not differentiate between gene edited and genetically modified products. Both are prohibited for sale to the EU.

The UK Government sees our departure from the EU as an opportunity for growing trade with other countries that have taken the same or similar tack in differentiating between GMOs and gene editing.

### Challenges

NSA is of the opinion precision breeding and gene editing is of interest to the sheep sector. As well as the potential progress to be made on methane emissions, there are avenues to explore to help tackle mastitis, OPA and footrot. But that cannot come with the risk of losing access to our largest export market, or create internal trade issues if England has one set of rules and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland another.

It is therefore relevant the European Commission recently launched a public consultation on the future regulation of gene editing techniques in EU crop production, with the intention of introducing proposals for a new legal framework in 2023.

In the meantime, it doesn't look likely there'll be any change to red meat imminently. Any field trials will be limited in the UK to plant material, at least for the next few years. So it is important for NSA to keep abreast of the situation as the technology develops.

## UK livestock gene banks

As the industry starts to further explore opportunities for precision breeding, NSA remains critically concerned the UK's livestock gene banks are not where they need to be.

In the event of a major incident where certain genetics were wiped out – due to a mass cull to counteract a disease outbreak, for example – gene banks ensure genetics are not lost. Herdwick semen collected during the 2001 foot-and-mouth disaster was used to sire lambs 10 years later, to demonstrate the genes from animals culled at that time were still available.

And if an industry pursues a specific breeding priority (through traditional selective breeding or through new gene editing), selecting for one trait only to find that another trait suffers as an unforeseen consequence, banks will allow breeding to come back from an extreme. A real-life example is the recent vogue for artisan bread made from the flour of heritage wheat varieties long abandoned due to lower yields.

Currently the UK livestock sector, including sheep, does not have the protection offered by a robust and dynamic gene bank – something NSA has raised to the UK Government and will continue to highlight.

Two of the main genetic banks that safeguard UK sheep genetics are the Rare Breed Survival Trust (RBST) Arc and the Ovine Semen Archive (OSA). RBST established the Arc in 2016 to protect specific breeds of sheep against diminishing numbers and potential threats posed by disease. It stores material from a limited number of rare and native breeds.

### Ovine Semen Archive

OSA, formed jointly with NSA and RBST in 2009, manages semen originally collected by Defra as part of the National Scrapie Plan (NSP). In the early 2000s NSP identified and removed scrapie-susceptible genetics from much of our national sheep flock, but semen was retained from culled individuals in case these scrapie-susceptible animals turned out to be resilient to a future disease threat.

The sheep industry did not want the genetics thrown away when Defra withdrew funding in 2009, and NSA and RBST has continued to



UK livestock gene banks need to be improved to safeguard the industry.

pick up the bill in lieu of there being a better alternative gene bank. While OSA is better than nothing, it is not a true representation of any individual sheep breed.

There are a small proportion of other semen and embryo stores, including material held by the Sheep Trust, some sheep breed societies and private stores, but this is not comparable to the Government-supported gene bank for plant material.

NSA believes it is the responsibility of the UK Government to establish a UK livestock gene bank, working in partnership with industry to identify and collect appropriate genetic resources and update them regularly. It is working with a number of industry partners to highlight this wherever possible.

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# Award opens up exciting opportunities for adventure-seeking young farmers

NSA is excited applications are open for the second pair of lucky recipients of the NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation.

The award, given in association with the Company of the Merchant of the Staple of England (the Staple), comes in the form of two generous £2,750 travel bursaries to support young people aged 21-34 in study trips to explore the application of science in sheep production. It gives enthusiastic and aspirational young sheep farmers the opportunity to widen their shepherding knowledge and experience.

The awards are gifted in memory of Samuel Wharry of Carnlough, County Antrim, who was NSA Chairman when he died suddenly in May 2017. Samuel was an advocate of science and technology, particularly relating to genetics, during



Marie used the award to investigate best practice at shearing.

his many years breeding Blackface sheep and was passionate about supporting the next generation.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive comments: "Having first offered the travel bursaries in 2019/20, the global pandemic prevented us opening applications for the second round as originally planned. But with the world opening back up again, NSA is delighted to be working with the Staple again and inviting applications for this special award.

## Opportunity

"It offers young sheep farmers support and inspiration to discover the important roles technology and innovation play for improving the worldwide sheep flock. I encourage all young people to find out more – as the award comes with a great deal of support attached to it, to help you plan your visit, make contacts overseas and report back afterwards.

"As long as the two selected recipients have a topic or idea they want to explore, NSA and the Staple will offer as much help as required to make the trip a reality. We are looking for individuals with genuine curiosity in a theme, enthusiasm about learning more and a willingness to share their experience afterwards."

Applicants need to answer a series of questions on the NSA Next Generation website, about their current involvement in the sheep sector, their plans for the future and an outline of a planned study trip to learn more about the practical application of science, innovation and technology in the sheep sector.

Recipients of the first award, Marie Prebble, a sheep farmer and shearer from Kent, and Charlie Beaty, a mixed farmer from Warwickshire, received their bursaries in 2019.

The award enables exploration of practices in different countries.



Marie chose to travel to France, Norway, Iceland and parts of the UK, using her bursary to investigate best practice at shearing time, both improving animal welfare and wool presentation. Charlie travelled to New Zealand to investigate grassland management and how improvement and utilisation of permanent pasture can reduce production costs.

*Applications close on Monday 12th September. Shortlisted candidates to be interviewed online on Monday 3rd October. More at [go.nationalsheep.org.uk/travelbursary](http://go.nationalsheep.org.uk/travelbursary).*



## Worldwide travel

Charlie Beaty won the award in 2019 and managed to spend a month in New Zealand in early 2020 before the pandemic hit. She says: "I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to see how different farms prioritised various aspects of their businesses and how management styles varied. I'm grateful to both NSA and the Staple for giving me such a fantastic opportunity."

# Glenrinnes Estate – Delights of Speyside



ADVERTORIAL

## Blackface ewes fit neatly into the organic farming business at Glenrinnes Estate, utilising the hill and providing the foundation for the whole sheep enterprise.

Glenrinnes is situated near Dufftown, Moray, in the heart of Speyside's many whisky distilleries and the rolling fields that merge into heather hills – making it not only picturesque but ideal livestock farming country.

Alister Laing is the estate manager and Charlie McIntyre the shepherd at Glenrinnes, which extends to 6,500 acres and runs for six miles along the glen, taking in several hills including Ben Rinnes, which rises to more than 2,700 feet.

Charlie says: "If we didn't have Blackies we would not be able to graze the hill. They do well here and our stratified system means we have the right stock in the right places."

Alister explains that, because it is an organic farm, grassland management is critical and they have to work with the seasons. This means the Blackie is not only the ideal sheep for the area and climate, but also for the management system.

There are 1,330 ewes on the farm. These are 580 Scotch Mules and Texel crosses and 780 Blackface, 300 of which are crossed with the Bluefaced Leicester. Mule ewes are put to Texel or Beltex cross Suffolk tups. They also sell about 50 Scotch Mule ewe lambs at Huntly each year.

## Organically finished

Around 480 Blackies are kept pure, and they retain 220 ewe lambs with everything else organically finished off grass, a rape-kale hybrid and, if necessary, oats and pellets.

Charlie says: "Because organic leys rely on clover for nitrogen, we get a great flush of grass in August, which is ideal for finishing the lambs on. We usually get about 700 away off grass."

Lambs are sold to Scotbeef and all meet the specification of 19-20kg deadweight. Charlie continues: "The 30p/kg premium for organic makes it worthwhile."

Of the pure Blackface flock, Charlie lambs 120 of the best ewes from 1st April and keeps tups from this flock to use, also selling 15 to 20 shearlings a year at Dingwall and Stirling marts.

He adds: "The aim is to breed good tups that will appeal to commercial buyers. I don't see the point in chasing fashion and trying to breed a breeders tup."

Ewe hogs are wintered at home and turned out to the hill from May to September, where they help with tick control for the grouse, as Glenrinnes is also a sporting estate. Blackface ewes are put out to the hill for a month after weaning but brought back down for tugging.

These hogs lamb from 15th April in silage fields and are then moved further up the glen. The cross ewes are lambed inside from the same date.

Ewes are sold draft at Kingussie and Dingwall marts, where last year they topped at £114 and £118 respectively. Cast ewes are sold at Huntly.

## Great success

Charlie is so passionate about Blackface sheep that he and his partner Gemma also have their own small flock of 110 ewes, which they keep on rented ground and enjoy showing locally with great success. They also successfully sell a few tups.

The estate farm also supports 40 pedigree Shorthorn cattle with a further 120 Shorthorn cross and Angus cross suckler cows, which are crossed with continental bulls. Cows are spring calving with 20 to 30 calves organically finished each year, while the rest are sold store directly to the finisher.

A relatively new enterprise on the farm is 400 red deer breeding hinds, which Alister looks after. Alister explains the farm could be more heavily stocked, but the aim is to make as much use of the grass as possible, as organic feed can be very expensive.

Around 100 acres is down to spring barley and there are 30 acres of the organic rape-kale hybrid. Alister continues: "Our aim is to keep the soil fertile and in good condition by rotations. We try to re-seed grassland every seven years with clover-heavy mixes."

This stunning estate has recently broken away from traditional shooting and farming enterprises by diversifying into producing its own organic gin and vodka. The 2019-built distillery sits in the shadow of Ben Rinnes and the spirit is called 'Eight Lands', after the eight counties that can be seen from the top of the mountain.

They offer distillery tours with a difference, where visitors can see round the farm and livestock and head to the top of Ben Rinnes before enjoying a more conventional distillery tour and tasting. Perhaps a good way for non-whisky drinkers to sample the delights of Speyside!

## Blackface Sheep Breeders' Association

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



# Expert advice making a difference to competition winner



As one of three winners of the joint NSA Next Generation and Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) competition, Luke Scott Paul from Masham, North Yorkshire, is already using his prize successfully.

Luke runs 530 ewes on the family's tenanted farm alongside his parents and brother. He has been matched with an adviser to aid his ambition to secure a good future for the farm.

"I would like to improve fertility on farm and, looking to the future, develop our business so it is able to support both mine and my brother's families," says Luke.

NSA and RoSA matched Luke with Debby Brown, an experienced sheep adviser, RoSA member and Technical Development Manager with Dugdale Nutrition.

## Mentoring

Debby says: "I was keen to be involved with this mentoring as it is important to me to ensure up to date knowledge and experience is passed onto farmers who want to improve productivity and performance in their flock."

After initially chatting with Luke on the phone, Debby visited the farm to learn more about the enterprise and make suggestions on improvements to help Luke and his family achieve their goals.

Debby explains: "I had a really engaging visit. Luke and I viewed his sheep and spoke about where and how improvements could be made."

Luke's flock includes a variety of breeds including Lley, Aberfield, Cheviots, Cheviot Mules

and Halfbreds, put to either Texel, Abermax or Charollais rams. Lambing takes place from March with groups lambed either inside or outside depending on number of lambs carried.

Debby continues: "The on-farm visit revealed some concerns around scanning percentage and lamb losses. I've highlighted this as a key area to investigate further and make some recommendations on."

In addition to now taking advice from Debby, the farm is already taking steps to gain access to useful information. They have joined a flock health group providing regular contact with local farmers and vets, allowing them to engage on health issues, such as parasite control.

## Tupping

Debby plans to visit Luke again before the crucial time of tupping to see if the advice given has helped to get lambs away quicker this year and get breeding stock in ideal condition ready for tupping once again.

Luke says: "The competition and the advice Debby has given me has been really useful. Debby's visit really opened my eyes to some things on farm I hadn't ever really given much thought to before."

"We plan to follow some of the advice she gave us, such as blood testing after weaning to look at our trace elements, and she completed some forage analysis for us also. Hopefully the information and tests will help move our flock performance in the right direction. Debby has also offered to visit again pre-tupping to help us ensure a good flush on our ewes that will ultimately lead to better scanning percentages."



Luke Scott Paul, winner of the NSA Next Generation RoSA competition.



Debby Brown, RoSA member and competition mentor.

NSA will provide further updates from Luke, as well as other winners, Euan Sanderson from South Lanarkshire and Josh Starling from Essex, in future Sheep Farmer magazines.



Forage analysis and livestock tests have enabled nutrition deficiencies to be targeted.

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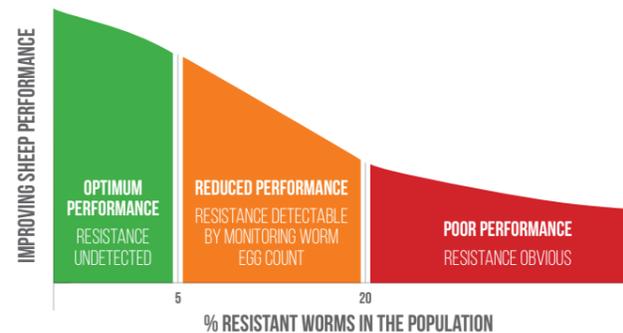
# ACT NOW TO HELP COMBAT ANTHELMINTIC RESISTANCE

Anthelmintic resistance (AR) is an ever-increasing threat facing the sheep industry, with 77% of farms already showing resistance to two or more actives. Adopting more sustainable worming practices is key to preserving the efficacy of the anthelmintics currently used in UK flocks. The success of this depends on making more sustainable choices early in the season to ensure that good worming strategies are in place for the year.

**77%** OF FARMS HAD RESISTANCE TO 2 OR MORE ACTIVES

## ACT EARLY IN THE SEASON TO PREVENT AR

If the same wormer group is used repeatedly, resistant worms will build up over the season. The longer resistance goes unchecked, the larger and more resilient the worm population will become - and once established, resistance can't be reversed. Additionally, the development of AR is sped up by increasing treatment frequency; the more often a wormer is used, the greater the selection pressure for resistance to that wormer. This is why adopting better worming practices at the start of the season, and proactively making a parasite prevention plan that prioritises responsible use is so important. Your flock health advisor/vet or RAMA will be able to develop a plan for your flock with you.



## AR COSTS, BEFORE YOU CAN EVEN SEE IT

86% of farmers still believe that the wormers they use are working as well as they always have. This is despite studies finding AR on 98% of farms. This mismatch in perception versus reality is due to resistance being a mostly invisible problem. In fact, by the time the effects of resistance can be seen on a farm, a reduction of 50% in lamb growth rates may have already occurred. The majority of the surveyed farmers were basing their opinion on 'the look and condition of their sheep', with less than a quarter using methods, such as faecal worm egg counts, to monitor treatment efficacy.

## WAKE UP TO THE IMPACT THAT AR COULD BE HAVING ON YOUR FARM...

**50%** DECREASE IN GROWTH RATES BEFORE CLINICAL SIGNS ARE SEEN

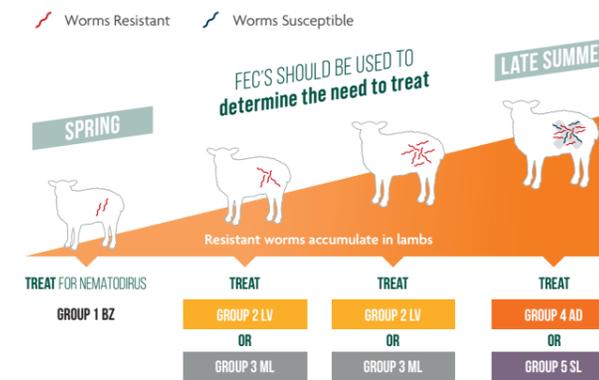
In one study there was a **2.8kg** difference in liveweight gain (equivalent of £9.05) and **14%** reduction in carcass value compared to when a fully effective wormer is used.

## HOW TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE WORMING SIMPLER

By following SCOPS principles, sheep farming can be more sustainable – this can be broken down into three key areas:

### 1. Worm strategically

- **Only dose when needed** – use the SCOPS Nematodirus Forecast and faecal egg counts to determine dose timing
- **Use newer wormer groups** - replace one dose of current wormer with one of the newer groups (e.g. group 4, monepantel, Zolvix™) in the latter part of the grazing season. This can help lambs to reach their full growth potential by removing worms that have survived previous doses. This treatment also helps to slow the development of resistance to the three older wormer groups, if it is incorporated into parasite plans before these older groups become ineffective.



- **Don't dose and move** – keep them in the same field for 4-5 days after dosing, before moving to clean grazing. This means when the sheep are moved to clean pasture there will be some worms which have not been exposed to any wormer. These won't have developed resistance, i.e. are still susceptible to the wormer, and will 'dilute' the population of resistant worms.

### 2. Give an effective quarantine treatment for all new and incoming animals

- Worm all new arrivals with one of the newer groups (e.g. group 4, monepantel, Zolvix™) to prevent resistance being brought in

### 3. Weigh sheep and calibrate equipment before dosing as under-dosing drives resistance

- Some worms may be part resistant/part susceptible to a wormer, so underdosing may not kill all of these worms. They will survive (as will fully resistant worms) meaning the percentage of resistant worms increases.

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- Recommended as a mid-late season break dose in lambs.



By planning ahead and making the right worming choices early in the season, the rate at which anthelmintic resistance develops can be reduced – helping to safeguard the future of UK sheep farming.

For further information call Elanco Animal Health on +44 (0) 1256 353131 or write to Elanco UK AH Limited, Bartley Way, Bartley Wood Business Park, Hook RG27 9XA. ZOLVIX™ 25 mg/ml oral solution for sheep. Legal category: POM-VPS in UK. Information regarding the side effects, precautions, warnings and contra-indications can be found in product packaging and leaflets; further information can also be found in the Summary of Product Characteristics. Advice should be sought from the medicine prescriber. Zolvix, Elanco and the diagonal bar logo are trademarks of Elanco or its affiliates. Use medicines responsibly ([www.noah.co.uk/responsible](http://www.noah.co.uk/responsible)). © 2022 Elanco or its affiliates. PM-UK-21-0351. Date of Preparation: May 2022

# Good work-life balance key to South West sheep enterprise

By Katie James, NSA

A desire to build a business that can support his extended family while allowing a healthy work-life balance is the driving force behind NSA South West Chair Olly Matthews' sheep farming enterprise.

This motivation has helped Olly make some brave but wise business decisions, including the biggest one yet – to move from the family farm at Yatton, Somerset, to a new holding, hopefully this autumn.

Olly has not been afraid to change paths to achieve his aims, starting with a career change to take over his grandparents' farm alongside brother Ed, 10 years ago.

He explains: "Having completed a degree in bioveterinary science, I had secured a place to continue studying veterinary medicine. But I couldn't shake off my enthusiasm for farming. I continued to push on and I've not regretted it."

## Grazing

Currently Olly farms a range of owned and rented grazing on a combination of farm business tenancies and short-term grass lets, including conservation grazing with the Avon Wildlife Trust. These various land parcels mean the business spreads across a 10-mile radius from the home farm.

"Grandad had an old dairy farm with an extensive set of farm buildings but only about 10 acres (4ha). Over the past 12 years we have acquired more rented ground wherever we can,

as well as buying some of our own land. We are now farming about 450 acres (182ha) spread across North Somerset, with eight different landlords," he adds.

The biggest change in the business to date came when Olly made, in some people's opinions, a risky decision to move from the traditional lowland, indoor lambing system to one that was far less intensive, with all stock lambed outside.

"To make this change I knew we'd have to move away from our flock of Suffolk and Texel cross Mules to a different breed. I wasn't bothered which, but it would have to be able to perform with less input from us and allow us to breed our own replacements," he says

Having seen the performance of Romney ewes on a trip to New Zealand six years ago, Olly was taken with the use of maternal records and lower inputs. He says: "The system worked in more challenging conditions than our farm in North Somerset. I thought if it could work well there, a similar system could work for us too."

At the same time Olly's younger brother Ed, with whom he is now in partnership with, had travelled to Australia and was equally impressed with this type of enterprise.

The farm now has a core business of 450 Highlander breeding ewes with 200 replacement ewe lambs. Ewes are mostly bred pure to produce replacement ewe lambs, although a Primera ram has also been used with success on ewe lambs.

All ewes are lambed outdoors in April. After scanning, they are split into groups to best utilise the grassland available. Ewes typically scan



Olly Matthews.

around 187% with the aim to wean 165-170%. All stock is 100% grass fed even during lambing. "We have planted some forage rape and turnips this year to finish lambs on," Olly adds.

## Drivers

Building a life that can sustain two families, including Olly's own young family with two children, has been a big driver in the change to a lower input system. Work-life balance is incredibly important to him.

He comments: "We started the change to a less intensive system around the time our first child, Isla, was born. Now I can be around much more. It's the small things like being in for tea every evening and not working through the nights during lambing – it's made for a much better lifestyle."

Olly says the change in work volumes has not only improved the family's lifestyle but also flock performance: "We've seen fewer health problems since moving to outdoor lambing. No watery mouth, no foot problems and very few ewes with twin lamb disease," he said.

Focus on low input, outdoor lambing system to achieve a healthy work-life balance.



“

There's a lot to be said for keeping things simple in your system to give yourself time to just enjoy it.

Olly Matthews

”

But the farm's previous reliance on creep feed has potentially led to an undiagnosed mineral problem becoming apparent over the past few years. Olly explains: "We are just starting to explore options for counteracting this. I think it stems from when we used to lamb early and rely on creep feed. In this scenario lambs could access the minerals from the creep, so issues with any deficiencies in the grass were not highlighted. But last autumn we had real issues with worms and liver fluke. We know our resistance status so know it's not that. We believe it's an immunity problem instead from deficient levels of cobalt and selenium."

In an effort to overcome this, the farm has started using a mineral drench and the plan is to bolus lambs at weaning, with the difference this year already being observed.

Although stock health is generally very good, the topography of North Somerset means it is important to keep on top of liver fluke risks. Olly explains: "We had an issue last year with summer fluke as our fields are bordered by large open ditches, referred to in Somerset as rhynes. They provide all the water across the farm so it is inevitable there will be mud snails carrying fluke present on the field banks."

The use of vaccines for footrot has eradicated previous lameness issues. Olly says: "Traditionally, lameness was a big problem in our flock, but the move to breeding all our own replacements and the foot vaccine has transformed this. We worked hard to make improvements and I'm proud to see incredibly small numbers of lameness now, and no footrot."

All finished stock is sold deadweight to ABP, just across the county border in Yetminster, Dorset. Cull ewes are sold at the local market, Sedgemoor.

Sheep will always remain the main focus of the business, with Olly aiming to push numbers up, lambing 800 next year and ultimately in the

region of at least 1,500 ewes. Alongside this, he also runs a small suckler herd, cattle finishing business and rears 1,700 free range Christmas turkeys. The turkeys are all processed on-farm with one third sold from the farm gate and the remainder supplying local butchers.

Aiming to build on the business success, the family farm has been sold and the search is on for a new site of 400-500 acres (160-200ha) in South West England with two houses for both Olly and brother Ed. "It's an exciting opportunity," says Olly.

## Balance

Wherever the family finds itself, Olly is determined to continue balancing work and family.

"I think, as an industry, we use too many excuses on farm for working silly hours. I used to do it, but I have realised there's a lot to be said for keeping things simple in your system to give yourself time to just enjoy it. I faced a lot of doubters when we said we were going to change our approach. We didn't take it to heart or get put off and we are so glad we didn't," he says.



All finished stock sold on contract to Tesco via ABP.

More time off farm has also allowed Olly to take part in initiatives and join committees of interest to him, something that kick-started when he was selected for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme in 2016.

"It was really good for encouraging us to do different things, and the other ambassadors become and continue to be, a good support network," he adds.

Olly went on to become more involved with NSA, becoming NSA South West Region Chair earlier this year.

He also sits on the NSA English Committee, of which he says: "I find the group really interesting. I enjoy being involved and speaking with key decisionmakers in industry. It shows how NSA really does fight for what is best for the country's sheep farmers."

## Farm facts

- Flock of 450 Highlander ewes plus 200 followers spread across 450 acres (182ha) of owned and rented land in North Somerset.
- Low input, outdoor lambing system to achieve a healthy work-life balance.
- All finished stock sold on contract to Tesco via ABP.
- Sheep enterprise complemented by a small suckler herd, cattle finishing business and free range Christmas turkeys.

The Highlander ewe has worked well for Olly and Ed.

# Supporting each other through difficult times

With mounting pressures across the agricultural sector, farming charity the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institute (RABI) says it has seen a recent increase in demand for its services.

As well as launching new support measures to meet the changing needs of farming people, RABI continues to promote the importance of having good mental health.

"None of us can ignore the challenges currently facing many sheep farmers," says Caron Whaley of RABI. "Our 2021 farming survey shone a light on the immense scale of pressures and stresses that farmers face, and the impact these challenges can have on their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as the health of their farm businesses."

The research identified that more than a third of farming people in England and Wales

sometimes feel depressed. Livestock farmers are among those most at risk of poor mental wellbeing with those in less favoured areas grazing livestock frequently facing a higher average number of stress factors. This is also the farming sector second most likely to experience depression, after pigs.

## Uncertainty

As farm support payment scheme changes bring increased uncertainty, RABI's research evidenced for the first time the strong link between the financial health of farming businesses and the wellbeing of the farmers and their families operating them.

"Farming can be tough and, much as we might like to believe otherwise, none of us are invincible," continues Ms Whaley. "Sadly, for far too many people, accessing support still doesn't feel like the positive move forward it needs to be. RABI is working hard to move that dial, because if

people access support early on it can stop things becoming critical and passing the tipping point. Often, people just need a little support to get a fresh perspective."

## Seek help

When someone is struggling, it can be hard to admit that help is needed - so when RABI launched its in-person counselling service earlier in the year, the charity says it made the referrals process as straightforward and comfortable as possible.

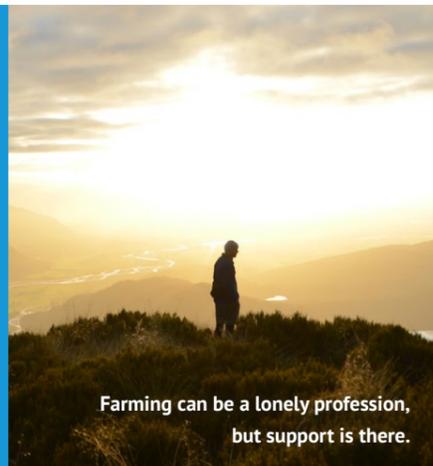
Accessibility and flexibility are also important, and counselling can be given face-to-face, by video or phone, to suit the individual's needs.

*To talk to a counselling professional, call RABI's free, confidential 24/7 helpline on 08001 884444. Clinical or GP referrals are not necessary and counsellors aim to respond to initial requests within 24 hours.*



## Top tips to support your wellbeing

- **Take time to stop.** When you're working long, unsociable hours, it's key to build in short breaks between tasks in your daily routine.
- **Talk to someone.** Farming people frequently work long and lonely hours, so it's important to have someone you can reach out to when you want to get something off your chest.
- **Have a hobby.** It can be easier said than done, but getting off the farm has a big benefit to your mental health.
- **Look after your physical health.** Farming is physical work and that can be tough, not just on our bodies, but also our minds.
- **Change one thing.** Don't let the thought of change be overwhelming. Taking just one small step can make a difference to how we feel.



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Improving forage utilisation or grazing multi-species swards can improve the bottom line.

## Simple steps to saving money and improving gross margins



Planning how to make a profit is an obvious but often overlooked element of sheep farming, according to Abbie Allen of Promar International.

She suggests planning and setting objectives for your enterprise is time well spent, especially with the current uncertainty surrounding input costs. Given the knock-on effect this could have on gross margins, having the ability to regularly monitor financial performance and budget is extremely useful, she says, recommending the use of farm financial management software to do this.

When it comes to the specifics of making a profit, Ms Allen says: "One method for improving gross margins is to reduce purchased feed costs by promoting animal growth from forage. Ensure your grass leys are in good condition and plan grass utilisation to avoid overgrazing and reduced grass growth."

### Forage

"Herbal or multi-species leys including legumes are a great choice. In addition to increasing the protein content of the forage, legumes fix nitrogen reducing the need for expensive fertiliser."

"Focusing on animal growth from forage will reduce concentrate usage and costs while also improving your carbon footprint, which is becoming a focus point in food supply chains."

"High feed prices seem set to continue, which will put a lot of pressure on cashflow. The ability to budget and forecast can help to mitigate some of the problems that may arise from high feed prices."

In this area, Ms Allen says farm management

software can be advantageous, providing detailed inventory management and enabling easy tracking of what's in storage, its value, its use and the profitability of what it's been used on.

When looking to what not to reduce spending on, Ms Allen says not to cut back on optimising sheep health.

She points specifically to good hygiene at lambing time, as well as targeted use of medicines. She says: "Unnecessary medication or treatments use is not good veterinary spend. Avoid blanket treating flocks with medication and wormers. Not only will this increase costs but runs the risk of increasing resistance."



Good hygiene and use of preventative treatment is money well spent.

When it comes to internal parasites, she recommends regular faecal egg counts to help understand if there is a need to treat and the best type of wormer to use. If in doubt, refer to guidance from the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep.

"Spend wisely – prevention is better than cure. Most farm management software will allow the creation of cashflows and gross margins to see what the effect will be financially. Using these

to evaluate the cost benefit is recommended," she adds.

Breeding for a better carcase is another area Ms Allen recommends. Finishing weight, conformation and fat class are all factors that affect the price received, which influences gross margin. Take the time to choose an appropriate breed for your system, aligned with your flock key performance indicators (KPIs) and business goals, she says. Use EBVs when purchasing breeding stock to help maximise production efficiency.

### Software

Ms Allen continues: "Good farm management software allows you to record and monitor production, enabling performance measuring and analysis. Collecting production data enables you to streamline production costs over time."

"Improving your gross margin requires planning, monitoring and decision making. Utilising KPIs and planning short, medium and long-term business goals are essential. This helps to focus the business and maximise production efficiency. Planning involves cashflows and budgets which will help to influence business decisions."

Ms Allen concludes with a recommendation to take advantage of outside help, such as that offered by consultants, to help with data input, and streamline the management of finances, to assist in setting KPIs and goals, monitor technical and financial performance, and create cashflows and budgets. They can also advise on farm management software to work out a real-time profit and loss position based on timing of payments, and to allow comparison of actual with planned performance.

## Strong prime lamb trade supported by live sales system



Prime lamb trade has stayed strong, with livestock markets across England and Wales reporting prices 40-60p/kg (around, £20/head) above the same time last year, says the Livestock Auctioneers Association.

James Amphlett of McCartneys at Worcester says there was a large spike in market averages ahead of the Qurbani festival in early July across the country.

"We saw 2,900 lambs at an average 318p/kg in the last sale ahead of the festival," he says, comparing this to strong entries of 1,800-2,200 lambs per week anyway. "In the sale following the Qurbani festival we still saw 1,700 lambs through, at an average of 297p/kg, still some 40-60p up on this time last year."

In North Wales, at St Asaph market, the trade on the best continental lambs has been strong throughout, with prices regularly hitting £170-£200 each week.

Sion Eilir Roberts of Jones Peckover explains: "We have seen terrific shows of lambs each week which has been a credit to all vendors. It has also been great to see them being rewarded in their prices."

### Autumn sales

As the summer months quickly pass by, preparations turn to the autumn sales with store lambs and breeding sheep.

Ian Atkinson of North West Auctions says: "Last year was a different season for store lambs, with the early store lambs leaving the best returns, which were sold in the strong trade leading up to the Christmas period."

"As we plan for the early sales of store lambs, we are expecting a trade as strong as last year's early sales. Looking ahead to the breeding sheep trade, the strong cull sheep trade must have a positive effect. With it now an attractive option to cull the flock hard and keep the flock young, the demand for replacement sheep should be strong," he adds.

Mr Amphlett says: "Certainly the next few weeks and the start of the store sales will be the real tester. However, the live sales ring will always create competition, due to there always being buyers, normally representing multiple companies. The live sales system has a market for everything."

*Ian Atkinson, James Amphlett and Sion Eilir are all members of the LAA Next Generation group for young auctioneers.*



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# Events for farmers and consumers boost wool awareness



As part of continued investment into promotion, British Wool has unveiled a new showroom to champion wool and the farmers who produce it.

Based at the British Wool Head Office in Bradford, West Yorkshire, the showroom features British Wool licensees, including Harris Tweed, Brockway Carpets, Camira, Yan Tan, Woolyknit, Devon Duvets and many more. The space demonstrates the versatility of British wool in every area of textiles, while creating a place to host examples of existing brands and their products.

Graham Clark of British Wool says: "There is an emphasis on environmental sustainability in all products produced using British wool, as it is a natural, biodegradable fibre. Due to its durability, it also has a longer lifespan than other textile fibre products."

In the last 12 months, there has been an increase in demand for natural fibre, which can be attributed to consumers being more aware of the environmental impact of man-made fibres and materials. This can also be seen through an increase in interest from companies and community-led projects to incorporate and explore the potential of British wool.

## Increase demand

To promote the new showroom and increase the demand for British wool further, a virtual press day was hosted at the new showroom explaining the benefits of British wool as a natural fibre and how it can be used in everyday life, from bedding to clothing and even as laundry dryer balls.

British Wool aimed to engage further with sheep farmers and anyone with an interest in wool by opening its doors across all its UK grading depots in spring. Hundreds flocked to the open days with a desire to hear about the recovering wool market and the work being done to create and drive demand for British wool.

It also gave the depot teams an opportunity to showcase the important work being done in providing a quality service to all members regardless of the type and quality of wool produced, volume or location.

Gareth Jones of British Wool says: "We thank everyone who took the time to visit one of our depot open days and hope they enjoyed the experience. More than 650 people attended, which is excellent. Raising awareness of the service, the work being done to increase demand and highlighting the potential new opportunities for British wool is important. Alongside our members, we can continue to work together in maximising wool values and supporting the UK wool sector."

The new British Wool showroom emphasises the value of British wool products.



## What happens to your wool at a British Wool depot?

Once wool has been delivered into the depot, the first stage of the process is grading. Every fleece is individually graded, which determines the quality and grade awarded. British Wool says grading every fleece adds value, as it separates the better-quality clip from the poorer, enabling the better quality clip to achieve a higher price.

The next stage is testing. All British wool is independently tested for micron, colour and dry yield before it is sold at auction. Dry yield is the weight left after the wool is scoured and washed. Testing the wool to international standards gives the buyers confidence in the quality and the overall product they are buying.

The shearing and wool handling process can affect the end quality of the fleece. Using an approved, trained shearer alongside appropriate wool handling skills is crucial to ensure a decent quality wool clip is sent to the depot in the first place. British Wool has training programmes in place to support the next generation of shearers and wool handlers in learning and developing these skills.

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## Ewe & Shearling Sales



### July

Bentham  
Skipton  
Tuesday 26th July  
Wednesday 27th July

### August

Carlisle  
Skipton  
Leyburn  
Hawes  
Lancaster  
Carlisle  
Kendal  
Skipton  
Kirkby Stephen  
Bentham  
Bentham  
Friday 5th August  
Wednesday 10th August  
Friday 12th August  
Tuesday 16th August  
Wednesday 17th August  
Friday 19th August  
Saturday 20th August  
Tuesday 23rd August  
Thursday 25th August  
Friday 26th August  
Saturday 27th August

### September

Longtown  
Leyburn  
Cockermouth  
Penrith  
Barnard Castle  
Carlisle  
Wigton  
Longtown  
Skipton  
Kendal  
Carlisle  
Bentham  
Kirkby Stephen  
Leyburn  
Skipton  
Hexham  
Wednesday 1st September  
Friday 2nd September  
Friday 2nd September  
Tuesday 6th September  
Tuesday 6th September  
Thursday 8th September  
Saturday 10th September  
Tuesday 13th September  
Tuesday 13th September  
Saturday 17th September  
Monday 19th September  
Saturday 24th September  
Friday 23rd September  
Friday 23rd September  
Tuesday 27th September  
Thursday 29th September

### October

Lancaster  
Bentham  
Skipton  
Hexham  
Skipton  
Saturday 1st October  
Saturday 15th October  
Tuesday 18th October  
Thursday 20th October  
Wednesday 2nd November

\*Hexham  
Skipton  
Kirkby Stephen  
Kendal  
Bentham  
Hawes  
Hawes  
Longtown  
Middleton-in-Teesdale  
Lancaster  
Wigton  
Barnard Castle  
Barnard Castle  
Carlisle  
\*Hexham  
Pateley Bridge  
Cockermouth  
Leyburn  
Penrith  
Skipton  
Tow Law (at Hexham)  
St John's Chapel  
Bentham  
Hawes  
Longtown  
†Lazonby  
Lancaster  
Leyburn

Skipton  
Hawes  
Lazonby  
Leyburn  
Hawes  
Lazonby  
Kirkby Stephen

## Ewe Lamb Sales

### September

Friday 2nd September  
Tuesday 6th September  
Friday 9th September  
Saturday 10th September  
Saturday 10th September  
Monday 12th September  
Tuesday 13th September  
Tuesday 13th September  
Wednesday 14th September  
Wednesday 14th September  
Wednesday 14th September  
Wednesday 14th September  
Thursday 15th September  
Thursday 15th September  
Friday 16th September  
Friday 16th September  
Friday 16th September  
Tuesday 20th September  
Tuesday 20th September  
Thursday 22nd September  
Friday 23rd September  
Saturday 24th September  
Monday 26th September  
Tuesday 27th September  
Wednesday 28th September  
Friday 30th September  
Friday 30th September

### October

Tuesday 4th October  
Monday 10th October  
Wednesday 12th October  
Friday 14th October  
Tuesday 25th October  
Wednesday 26th October  
Saturday 29th October

**ITEMS IN BOLD ITALICS** - denotes Sales at which: All lambs forward will be the bonafide property of members of the Association and will be subject to the scrutiny of Association Sale Inspectors.

\* Denotes the Marts will be selling Mules out of both Northumberland type Blackface and Swaledale dams.  
† in conjunction with Alston Moor Day Sale.

2022

# NEMSA MULE SALES

07896 992598

# Is your farm ready for the green agenda and a carbon focused future?

Farm business strategies should now include sustainability and recognition of carbon footprints, says Brian Richardson of Virgin Money, recommending that producers access a farm carbon audit.

He says: "There is considerable change coming to the farming sector, not least the challenge of achieving net zero by 2040, but also consumers are placing greater importance on the carbon footprint of the foods they eat. Farmers must not underestimate the growing focus on carbon reduction and should strive to reduce carbon-intensive outputs and tackle on-farm sustainability. "While many farmers are starting to work towards net zero targets, there are many who know it needs to be higher on the agenda but aren't sure how to go about it."

## Financial help

Mr Richardson says Virgin Money is just one example of companies providing financial support for farm businesses to make the transition, in its case through a £200m Agri E fund.

"Ultimately this should aid productivity and efficiency on the farm – representing a win on carbon and support for improvements in financial returns," he says.

"Sustainability and recognising what carbon means should be a key part of a farm's business strategy and planning for the future. To do this accurately and effectively, a full carbon audit, something which is increasingly important in the agriculture supply chain, should be conducted. This audit will generate a comprehensive report of a farm's carbon outputs, highlight inefficiencies,

and recommend methods to lower costs and reduce carbon emissions. Grants are available."

One company offering carbon audit analysis is Carbon Metrics, suggesting it can identify where on-farm mitigation is both environmentally and commercially sustainable, removing some confusion. Helen Dent of Carbon Metrics says: "Being more efficient where carbon is concerned can have a positive impact on running costs, and completing a carbon audit is one of the methods to identify emissions sources and changes to reduce them.

"Soil management is key to all types of farming, so the first step is gathering samples to understand soil carbon levels. Often with livestock farming, the focus is understandably on the animals, but it's important to remember it is the soil feeding the grass that feeds those animals, impacting production.

"Several tests can be used to check soil health, including soil fertility, by analysing nutrient and pH levels. Knowing the levels of phosphate, potash and magnesium allows a correct mix of fertiliser to be applied and decreases unnecessary applications. Knowing soil pH and getting this right is key to soil management and maintaining optimum pH, both vital for growing productive crops and mitigating soil emissions."

Ms Dent goes on to say data management is crucial for carbon audits, with the accuracy of the data directly linked to the level of understanding of carbon.

She says: "Keeping up to date and accurate records of yields, fertiliser plans, stock rotations and slurry management are all ways of monitoring carbon. Remember, there are several options with data management to use technology to reduce emissions and costs, such as livestock sensors.

"When it comes to carbon management, identifying areas of high and low efficiency on farm is essential. Soil testing for carbon allows greater understanding on the stocks and potential for sequestration. Well managed grassland is known to lock away carbon if soil is not left exposed. Consider how adopting different plant species would increase home-grown forage giving greater control over the harvesting process and the plant species present.

"Incorporating deep rooted plants such as legumes and herbal species can help aerate the soil alongside increasing liveweight gain. They can also benefit dry matter per acre, something to consider utilising for silage. As with everything, ensure systems are reviewed regularly and changes are made as required."

## Carbon credits

Ms Dent ends with a warning about carbon offsetting. She says: "More companies are promising to buy farmland and plant trees to offset carbon emissions. Trees are only beneficial in the right places and if they are the right type. Take specialist advice and, if possible, utilise stewardship schemes for tree and hedgerow management.

"It is essential to manage risk, and fully understand your farm in terms of carbon, what is and isn't achievable, and what will benefit your business in the long run. Carbon planning will help prepare businesses for future targets and potential policy demands."

## Carbon top tips

1. Understand what carbon means on farm.
2. Undertake a carbon audit.
3. Take soil samples to understand soil carbon and manage the pH of soils.
4. Manage data to better understand carbon usage.
5. Farm efficiently for effective carbon management.
6. Consider how to increase home-grown forage.
7. Plan more efficient fertiliser usage.
8. Only plant trees in the right places with the right type of trees.
9. Maximise tree and hedgerow stewardship scheme opportunities.

Data management is key to understanding on-farm carbon.

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Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> August	Annual Sale of 6,500 SHEARLING GIMMERS, MULE, MASHAM & CONTINENTAL Special Sale of BREEDING SHEEP inc EWES & RAMS
Saturday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	Sale of 400 PEDIGREE BELTEX SHEEP
Tuesday 6 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of 7,500 NORTH OF ENGLAND MULE GIMMER LAMBS
Saturday 10 <sup>th</sup> September	PEDIGREE BLUE TEXEL SHEEP & EASY CARE SHEEP & RARE BREED SHEEP
Tuesday 13 <sup>th</sup> September	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sale of SHEARLING GIMMERS & Sale of all classes of BREEDING SHEEP + CHAROLLAIS RAMS
Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> & Friday 16 <sup>th</sup> September	41 <sup>st</sup> Annual Sale of 600 PEDIGREE TEXEL RAMS & FEMALES
Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup> September	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sale of 10,000 MULE GIMMER LAMBS
Tuesday 27 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of all classes of BREEDING SHEEP & RAMS Evening Show & Sale of BLUE FACED LEICESTER SHEEP
Thursday 29 <sup>th</sup> September	Sale of REGISTERED LLEYN BREEDING SHEEP
Friday 30 <sup>th</sup> October	1200 TERMINAL & NON TERMINAL SIRE (MVA & NON MVA) INC TEXEL, BELTEX, SUFFOLK, CHAROLLAIS, BLUE TEXEL, ZWARTBLE, CHEVIOT & OTHER PURE BREEDS
Saturday 1 <sup>st</sup> October	Annual Sale of 4,500 SWALEDALE EWES & SHEARLINGS
Tuesday 4 <sup>th</sup> October	Sale of SWALEDALE GIMMER LAMBS CONTINENTAL & OTHER GIMMER LAMBS Sale of MASHAM GIMER LAMBS Open Prize Sale of MULE GIMMER LAMBS
Saturday 8 <sup>th</sup> October	Pedigree CHAROLLAIS IN-LAMB FEMALES
Monday 10 <sup>th</sup> October	Special Evening sale of 120 SWALEDALE RAMS
Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> October	22 <sup>nd</sup> Annual Sale of 100 DALESBRED RAMS & FEMALES Sale of HILL RAMS inc 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sale of BFL Rams

Discussing goals with peers or advisers can boost success further.

# Making SMART goals can lead to greater success

EUROPEAN COLLEGE OF  
Small Ruminant  
HEALTH MANAGEMENT

By Rheinalt Jones, ECSRHM



At this time of year, farms tend to have the fewest number of sheep on site, and those that are there are destined to be tupped or sold as cull ewes, prime or store lambs.

This makes the next few months the perfect time to take stock and measure the year's successes. Success is individual and relates to both personal and business goals. Yet, quantifying success can be difficult, especially when considering the entire farm. So, where do you start?

Although success can look like standing still (you did as well this year as last year), it mainly relates to a change implemented to improve a certain metric. Be it fewer lambs lost, faster growth rates or less barren ewes.

Before choosing what parameters to improve

on, the parameters with greatest scope for improvement need to be determined. This can only be done by knowing where you are and what you have – through benchmarking.

Benchmarking is a process where inputs, outputs and performance are measured. It can be as complicated or simple as needed. The process involves calculating certain parameters called key performance indicators (KPIs) and comparing the results to a standard.

## Performance

This standard could be at your farm level, comparing your current performance to the performance achieved last year. It could be your peers within benchmarking groups, or industry standards published by organisations like AHDB and QMS. It is often done informally through conversations about scanning percentages and

growth rates with neighbours and colleagues.

However it is done, it's important that benchmarking compares like with like. Comparing the performance of an indoor lambing pedigree flock with an extensively managed outdoor lambing flock is unfair to both systems.

Dozens of KPIs can be calculated. But not all KPIs need to be calculated simultaneously. Initially, only a handful may be of interest. When benchmarking for the first time, KPIs that require no additional data collection should be targeted (see table). For example, the number of lambs sold per ewe to the ram is calculated by dividing the number of ewes introduced to the ram and the number of lambs sold from that breeding - data that is easily accessible. The number of KPIs monitored can then increase as confidence in data recording increases.

Examples of KPIs that can be calculated without collecting additional data.

Performance	Scanning percentage
	Lambing percentage
	Number of lambs sold per ewe to the ram
	Number of lambs lost per ewe to the ram
Financial	£ per lamb sold
	£ per cull sold
	£ per ewe to the ram



Setting objectives using SMART goals allows progress to be monitored.

Benchmarking software packages can either be purchased or downloaded for free (such as AHDB Farmbench) to calculate financial and animal performance-related KPIs. Although many can also be calculated with pen and paper or a simple spreadsheet.

This can be done independently or can be facilitated by an adviser, consultant or vet. Using facilitators can help interpret the data correctly, ensuring those KPIs with the greatest scope for improvement are identified.

## Target setting

You shouldn't only concentrate on the areas where improvements can be made – but also remember to recognise and celebrate areas where you have excelled.

Identifying the areas where improvements can be made is often easier than successfully improving them. All efforts should therefore be made to increase the rate of success. Goal setting has been shown to increase task success rates since the 1980s. Sharing goals with peer groups or advisers and asking them to hold the goal-setter responsibility can result in success rates rising even further.

However, not all goals are made equal. Goal setting should be approached carefully and should be SMART-specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Structuring goals in this way enables the breaking down of complex problems into manageable sections, which can be completed separately. This makes any overarching goal attainable, increasing success. Succeeding isn't easy, but with careful planning, we are all more likely to succeed.

## SMART goals

- **Specific.** Goals should be narrow, concentrating on individual or aspects of individual KPIs. Instead of setting a goal by stating, "I want to improve animal health," specify aspects that needs improving, such as "I want to reduce the proportion of lame ewes in my flock."
- **Measurable.** By making sure goals are quantitative, any progress towards goal completion can be monitored. This enables the evaluation of implemented interventions, correcting the course if necessary. The goal then becomes, "I want to reduce the proportion of lame ewes in my flock from 10% to 5%."
- **Achievable.** Goals must be realistic, as unattainable goals are demoralising and will often result in no or even backward progress.
- **Relevant.** Goals must be important to the goal setter and ultimately benefit the business.
- **Time-bound.** Each goal should have an end date to motivate completion and prompt reevaluation, as some goals may not be attainable until other goals are achieved. This changes the example goal to, "I want to reduce the proportion of lame ewes in my flock from 10% to 5% within the next two years."

Therefore, in the example goal of reducing the proportion of lame ewes, it could be broken down into smaller action-based goals that aid the overall objective. For example:

- I want to vaccinate all breeding sheep against lameness in the next six months.
- I want to identify all lame sheep and cull those becoming lame on two or more occasions over the next 12 months.

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# Rotational grazing and herbal leys demonstrate productivity boost

Evidence suggests properly planned and managed rotational grazing and herbal leys can have clear benefits for sheep farmers looking to improve productivity while reducing inputs.

However, there are challenges to successful implementation that need to be weighed up, meaning these practices may not be suitable for everyone.

Matthew Jordon, a researcher at Oxford University with a background on a family sheep and beef farm in Northumberland, has analysed research on rotational grazing and herbal leys from nine countries with similar climates and production systems to the UK to weigh up the pros and cons.

"One of the main considerations when adopting rotational grazing and herbal leys onto your farm are rest periods," says Mr Jordon, explaining longer rest periods in rotational grazing systems result in taller swards overall. This impacts positively on forage availability, leading to increased liveweight gain when grazed.

## Sward height

Mr Jordon says: "Taller swards are able to grow more rapidly because they have a greater leaf area available for photosynthesis, compared to more tightly grazed, shorter swards."

However, to achieve this benefit in practice, it can be important to vary the length of rest periods throughout the grazing season to account for different forage growth rates.

"For example, don't have a fixed number of land parcels/paddocks in the rotation. Instead, remove some during peak grass growth (make silage or hay

with any excess), then add back into the rotation to increase rest periods when grass growth slows," he explains, adding this becomes particularly relevant in years when insufficient rainfall limits grass growth towards the middle of the growing season. To counteract insufficient rainfall, longer rest periods are required.

Incorporating herbal leys into pasture has also demonstrated direct benefits for forage production (and thus liveweight gain) by aiding various soil properties. The different forage species in herbal leys include nitrogen-fixing legumes and deep-rooted herbs, which increase soil health, soil fertility and build drought resilience and resistance.

## Key species

Mr Jordon adds: "Key forage species including cocksfoot, chicory, lucerne and sainfoin improve drought tolerance from greater access to water in the soil profile, coupled with improved nutrient uptake. Shallow rooted species alone, such as perennial ryegrass or white and red clovers, do not have these benefits."

There is also evidence increasing sward diversity aids forage availability in comparison to simpler swards. For example, by including species with complementary traits such as root depth and maturity dates. Diverse swards also offer benefits for sheep by providing a variety of dietary components from one pasture, reducing reliance on additional minerals, trace elements and boluses.

Mr Jordon goes on to say there is potential to use rotational grazing and herbal leys to build soil carbon – and while existing studies on this are not comparable to the UK, work is ongoing both in this country and abroad to demonstrate it.

He says: "There are plausible mechanisms for how these practices could sequester carbon, primarily through increasing inputs of dead plant material and sugars from roots into the soil. This promotes microbial activity, helping lock carbon in stable soil aggregates."



## Considerations

Thing to be aware of if planning to rotationally graze herbal leys:

- Initial financial and time investment needed in fencing and water infrastructure.
- Potentially more labour required during grazing periods.
- Need to address weeds before establishment, due to the non-specificity of broadleaf herbicides.
- Careful management required to ensure persistence of herbal leys. Rotational grazing is suggested to be better for establishment and persistence. In addition, leaving sufficient plant residuals between grazing periods allows quicker regrowth during rest periods.
- Grazing herbs in wet winter conditions is not recommended.

*There is relevant government support currently available in England, with decisions in the devolved nations hopefully following suit. Get part-funding for electric fencing materials via the farm equipment and technology fund, and a higher SFI payment rate for improved grassland soils.*

Grazing herbal leys has shown to increase liveweight gain, when managed properly.



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# Beware the hidden extras when buying in sheep

Quarantine new or returning stock for at least four weeks buys you time.

Introducing new animals is the highest risk you will expose your flock to, yet only last week I heard a tale of someone who, as a gift for their kids, had purchased a pair of cute novelty lambs.

Lovely idea, but they were turned straight out with the farm's commercial animals, without giving a thought to any diseases they might have picked up in transit or been carrying beforehand. Once disease or resistance gets in, you cannot undo it.

## Guidance

This can feel overwhelming when you consider all the possible disease risks. You cannot eliminate them all, but you can reduce them by taking some general steps.

- Buy from as few sources as possible, and ideally a single source. A higher number of flocks of origin logically increases the likelihood an animal will bring disease with it.
- Prevent the preventable. Check vaccination statuses (at least against clostridial disease and pasteurellosis) and where any doubt exists, vaccinate on arrival.
- Quarantine for four weeks. Allow time for parasite treatments, testing and for any short-term problems to come to light.
- Consider stock returning to the farm, as well as bought-in animals.

I have often heard farmers complain that four weeks is too long. Given the timing of tup sales, I can really sympathise, when you need new purchases to get to work for you. But this isn't a number invented to make your life difficult. It's a timescale necessary to detect brewing disease and tackle resistant parasites, protecting your existing stock. Far better to deal with a single problem animal than a larger scale issue after he's been in the desired close-contact with your entire breeding flock.

It's helpful to ask yourself what your flock's current status is. If you know you are free from a specific disease, there may be targeted steps you can take to keep it out, such as buying from accredited sources or testing during quarantine.

## Biosecurity

If you aren't sure, don't be afraid to pick up the phone to get some guidance from your vet. Most vets would prefer to be asked about biosecurity than devise a plan to control a disease problem that could have been prevented.

The isolation period provides time to monitor, test and potentially treat for specific diseases.

Some diseases have no easy way to test for. In these cases, risk has to be reduced through communication with the vendor. For example, in the absence of effective lab tests, some flocks with ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA) problems may try to cull for this disease by ultrasound scanning. This is an imperfect method of control, but you may decide sourcing from that flock represents a better alternative than buying animals of unknown status.

Balancing trust with healthy scepticism is a challenge, and your own attitude to risk will ultimately determine your course of action.

Common diseases to consider when buying stock.

Disease	Action to reduce risk	
Iceberg diseases	Johne's	Buy from an accredited flock with low risk level.
	Maedi visna (MV)	Buy from an accredited flock, isolate and test incoming animals.
	Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA)	No test available. Ask vendor if any evidence in their flock.
	Caseous lymphadenitis (CLA)	Isolate and check incoming animals for skin lumps and swellings.
Parasitic disease	Border disease	Isolate and test incoming animals for virus.
	Fluke	Isolate incoming animals, consider blood testing for scab and use a quarantine parasite treatment protocol according to risk. Seek advice from your vet or SQP and follow SCOPS principles to minimise the selection for parasites resistant to treatments. Always test to check your worm and fluke treatments have been effective.
	Worms	
Scab		
Other infectious diseases	Footrot	Isolate, inspect feet, treat any signs of disease, footbath, vaccinate.
	Contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD)	Isolate, inspect feet, contact your vet if any signs of disease, footbath.
	Enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE)	Buy from accredited flock, isolate and test incoming animals.
	Orf	Isolate incoming animals.

By Eilidh Corr, QMS  


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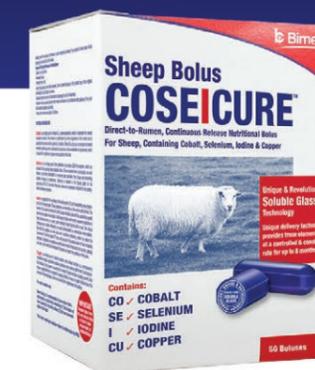
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Plan to keep all incoming stock separate from the home flock.

## How safe will your flock be this autumn?

In recent years, there has been a tangible shift towards sheep farmers either breeding their own replacements or sourcing them direct off farms.

While this will reduce many infectious disease risks, avoiding others still requires buyers to have a careful plan.

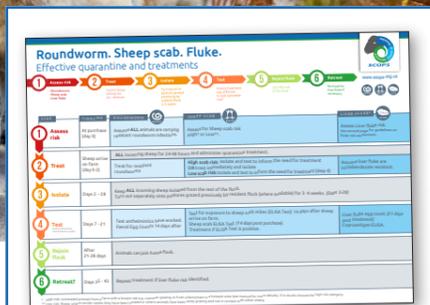
Even the majority of 'closed' flocks will have to buy in rams now and again, and what about those ewes or lambs that went away for grazing? They also pose a threat that has to be dealt with when they return home.

The problem is many diseases are not visible when stock arrives. Even conditions such as contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) or footrot may not show up for some time, and parasites like sheep scab or lice may take months to show their hand. Resistant worms or fluke are always a threat and will not be seen until they have established themselves in the parasite population on farm, which is then too late.

The only way to be sure you are not buying in trouble is to put in place a combination of

isolation on arrival (quarantine), testing and treating. The resulting protocol can look daunting, so SCOPS has developed some materials to help with the planning of this vital step in the sheep year (see panel).

- 1. Isolation.** Plan to keep all incoming sheep completely separate from the home flock for at least four weeks. This gives you time to carry out tests and treatments for parasites and look for other issues such as orf or CODD.
- 2. Testing.** An exciting new element in the testing toolkit is the use of the sheep scab ELISA test. This blood test can detect sheep scab as soon as two weeks after exposure and means you can avoid unnecessary scab treatments. Also test during this period to make sure the wormer doses given have been fully effective, before you turn the sheep out with the rest of the flock.
- 3. Treatments.** Choosing the right product(s) is the key to success. Use the SCOPS guide to make sure you get the right ones to remove any resistance worms, while avoiding any unnecessary treatment for sheep scab.



### Six steps to quarantine success

The new SCOPS quarantine guide provides producers, vets and advisers with clear guidance and timings on how to address anthelmintic resistant roundworms, sheep scab and liver fluke, including risk assessment, isolation, testing and treatment options.

- 1. Assess the risk.** What could be present?
- 2. Treat.** Yard or house animals for 24-48 hours.
- 3. Isolate.** Turn out onto grass previously grazed by resident flocks for four weeks.
- 4. Test.** Ensure treatment was effective. Is scab a possible risk?
- 5. Rejoin flock.** Allow new or returning stock to join the rest of the flock.
- 6. Retreat.** For fluke if necessary.

To help you prepare a farm specific plan, there are calendar examples covering four scenarios at different levels of risk – all available from the SCOPS website.

There is a blank calendar that can be customised for individual farms. Because the sheep remain in isolation for four weeks, this calendar can also be used as an aid to add in tests and examinations for other threats, including footrot, CODD and orf. [Download the guide and calendars at www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/quarantine-advice-for-internal-and-external-parasites.](http://www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/quarantine-advice-for-internal-and-external-parasites)



Sheep scab ELISA test uses blood samples from the flock for diagnosis.

### Case study: Rob Helliwell

Derbyshire sheep farmer and SCOPS Vice Chair

"Keeping disease to a minimum in the sheep flock is a constant battle and, for me, quarantining purchased stock before mixing into the established flock is essential and has both health and financial benefits. We make sure we dose all purchased sheep with either a group four (AD-orange) or five (SI-purple) wormer as part of this, while the new SCOPS guidance helps us work through the other steps, for example for liver fluke and sheep scab, to ensure we don't get caught out."

# Prevent enzootic abortion or prepare for future losses.

Enzootic abortion (EAE) costs the UK sheep industry an estimated £20 million annually!

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The majority of farmers surveyed are taking practical steps to reduce worm resistance.



# Survey suggests sheep sector could better utilise newer wormers

A survey by Elanco Animal Health has shown that, while the majority of sheep farmers are actively managing worm resistance, or working towards slowing it down, less than 20% are incorporating a newer wormer product into their annual programme.

Matt Colston of Elanco points to advice from the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group to integrate these newer wormers, saying steps to do so are crucial to slow the rate at which wormer resistance is continuing to develop.

While 87% of the farmers surveyed are taking practical steps to slow down or prevent resistance to the older group one (BZ-white), two (LV-yellow) or three (ML-clear) wormers, only 19% of farmers surveyed have integrated group four or five products.

The data indicates this may partly be due to some producers believing they are unaffected by resistance, demonstrated by 59% having not tested for wormer resistance and 54% not checking the efficacy of their wormer post-treatment.

## Resistance status

Mr Colston explains that, regardless of a farm's current resistance status, SCOPS advice is to use a newer group four (AD-orange) or five (SI-purple) wormer for lambs during the mid-late season, and as a quarantine dose for all incoming sheep.

He says: "Overuse of any wormer group will irreversibly speed up the rate resistance develops. Introducing a newer group wormer before there is a visible problem, is therefore vital. Updating your worm control plan to include this for lambs in the latter part of the grazing season will help slow the development of resistance to the older wormers, while clearing out any resistant worms that may be compromising lamb growth and performance."

"When used as part of a quarantine treatment, the newer wormer groups will minimise the risk of resistant worms being brought onto the farm."

The survey showed for those already using a group 4 wormer (AD-orange), half use it as quarantine treatment and 42% use it as a mid-late season break dose for lambs, when best practice would be for all farms to include it at both these key points.

Waiting until there is known resistance on farm is considered a dangerous strategy, says Mr Colston, emphasising the crucial importance of following industry advice.

He says: "The results suggest a significant proportion of farmers are unknowingly feeding wormer resistance. If we want healthy, productive sheep and profitable sheep farms in the future, this is something that must change."

Advice is to use group four (AD-orange) or five (SI-purple) wormers in lambs towards the end of the grazing season.



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# Successful liver fluke management on hill farms

By working together and accessing a range of tools, a group of hill farmers in Cumbria and Yorkshire has successfully implemented a 'bottom-up' approach to liver fluke control, resulting in financial and management benefits through better disease understanding.

Amanda Carson of APHA jointly led the Hill Sheep Health North initiative, which involved 27 sheep farmers. She says: "This project has demonstrated how bringing farmers together has increased their understanding of a complex disease. By providing them with the tools to make informed decisions, a bottom-up approach enabled them to reduce the potential for development of resistance to the limited numbers of chemicals available for the treatment liver fluke, and to benefit from significant cost savings in time, labour and medicines.

"It is a format that would lend itself to improving how farmers approach many challenges facing sheep flocks in the UK."

## Novel app

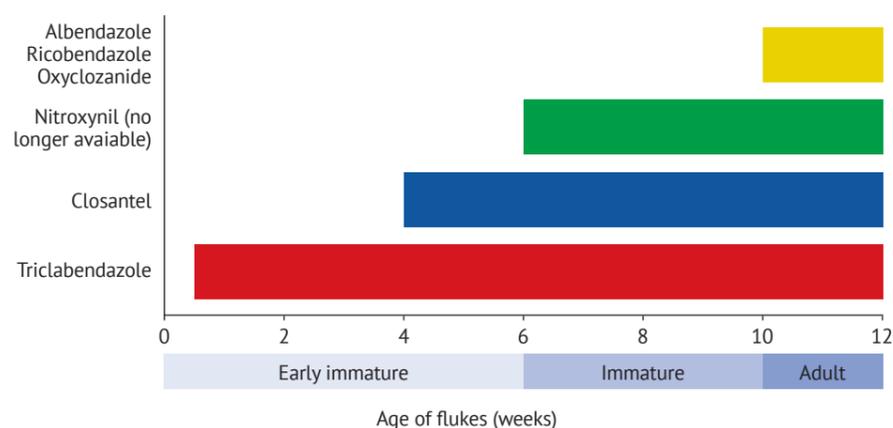
One tool used in the project was a new app, which was trialled for its ability to monitor treatment choice and application. It enabled the farmers involved in the project to monitor flukicide use and increase their knowledge of appropriate fluke treatments at the right time of year (see diagram).

Dr Carson says: "A key part of using this technology was understanding the limited chemicals and action of flukicides on the different stages of the lifecycle. In addition, farmers were able to experience on-farm post mortems, including carcase inspection, giving them further insight into liver fluke infections, increasing their understanding of its complex lifecycle."

Farmers were introduced to the different lab tests available to diagnose liver fluke (see panel), allowing them to trial different options free of charge. One farmer comments: "I am converted to testing now – even if I have to pay for it. You can't have too much information."

During the study, the total spent on flukicides fell by approximately 40%, demonstrating significant savings through monitoring, testing and treating when necessary.

Stages of flukes and active chemicals at different stages.



Introducing farmers to different testing options prompted open discussions on the use of tests to support decision-making related to the timing of treatments and which drug to use, both important to provide value for money and reduce resistance pressure on flukicides.

Another farmer comments: "Being able to dung sample sheep at different times backs up what you are doing and helps you understand things more. You also know you are giving things when you should be giving them and not giving drugs unnecessarily."

A third project participants backs this up: "Getting ideas and discussing it with other people is really good, because you can tell them how you do something, see how they do it and compare."

## Resistance

The use of the faecal egg reduction tests allowed triclabendazole resistance to be confirmed on some of these farms, possibly due to previous 'precautionary' treatments being administered when farmers had access to gathered sheep, rather than because the animals were infected. Laboratory testing improved knowledge of lack of efficacy on individual farms, highlighting specific resistance issues.

Farmers were introduced to fluke forecasting, and its key role in determining when to treat sheep for fluke.

Dr Carson continues: "Climate forecasting can provide a rough guide but tends to be regional, and differences can be much more localised. The emergence of fluke was later than expected by the farmers, and those farmers who were testing animals were able to delay treatments until the winter, thus saving time and money.

By Rachael Collins & Amanda Carson, APHA



"Sentinel testing using the serum ELISA test was found to be the most useful tool for liver fluke forecasting. With penside testing on the horizon, combining this with forecasting would be a game changer for tackling liver fluke."

A final part of the project was to investigate effective solutions such as grazing management. Evaluating solutions completed the knowledge provision to farmers, enabling them to tackle liver fluke effectively in the future.

*The project was led by Amanda Carson and Bryony Jones of APHA and Dai Grove White of Liverpool University, with support from Aberystwyth University, Flock Health, Moredun Research Institute, SCOPS, Yorkshire Agricultural Society and Farmer Network. More at [www.hillsheephealthnorth.co.uk](http://www.hillsheephealthnorth.co.uk).*



Understanding fluke lifecycle helps select an effective treatment.

## Liver fluke diagnostics

- Faecal egg counts (FEC).
- Faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT).
- Faecal coproantigen fluke ELISA test.
- Blood ELISA test on sentinel animals (first season grazing lambs) from the hill flocks.

# Benefits provided by updates to maternal breeding indexes

By Laura Eyles, Signet Breeding Services



Investing in maternal rams with superior genetics can increase the productivity and profitability of sheep enterprises, as well as increase the overall value of the sector.

Over the past 50 years, advances within sheep production systems, including flock identification, record keeping, ultrasound scanning, handling systems and computing power, have transformed our ability to use information to identify and breed from sheep with superior genetics.

It is difficult to identify the best sheep by eye alone, particularly when looking for maternal traits. Hence the role of data services to get a greater understanding of a flock's performance and the genetic merit of individual sheep within it, enabling an unbiased method to identify sheep with the best genetic potential.

## Selection

EBVs predict an animal's breeding potential for a range of traits, making them a useful tool to aid the selection of breeding stock. Analysing farm records provides scope to determine how much of an animal's performance is due to their genetics and how much is due to environmental influences, like farm of origin, sex, age and rearing system.

To help ram buyers identify high performing sheep, EBVs are weighted within a maternal

breeding index taking into account their economic importance in meeting a specific breeding objective.

Signet has relaunched the maternal breeding evaluation, following a similar programme of work with terminal sire and hill breeds in recent years. The new evaluation (see panel) is a mixed breed model and includes the Bluefaced Leicester, Charmoise Hill, Easycare, Exlana, Jacob, Lley, Romney, Roussin, Tefrom and Wiltshire Horn breeds, as well as their crosses.

## Traits

Ewe mature weight and body condition score (both at mating) are new traits within the evaluation that help assess ewe efficiency. As a result of continued selection for faster lamb growth rates, mature ewe weights will increase. But more efficient ewes can be selected by assessing all these attributes.

Worm resistance is another key area of interest. Sheep display genetic variation in terms of their ability to resist parasites and this can be exploited in breeding programmes. For many years breeders have selected sheep with superior EBVs for faecal egg counts. More recent work at Glasgow University has shown antibody responses can also be used as a biological marker for host response to infection. This phenotype provides a new way to identify genetic differences between sheep in their resistance to worm challenge and a breeding value of this trait has just been released.



Combining selection and recording enables identification superior genetics.

## New maternal breeding index

- Enhances lamb growth rates and muscling while selecting more prolific ewes with superior maternal performance.
- Generates a set of breeding values that is more relevant and easier to interpret by commercial ram buyers.
- Enhances existing EBVs. Lambing ease, birth weight, litter size, maternal ability and faecal egg count have all been updated using the latest research.
- Provides more regular breeding evaluations.
- Updates breeding indexes for dual purpose maternal and crossing breeds.

Changes to the use of ultrasound scanning data is also ongoing. Signet recorded flocks use ultrasound scanning to identify sheep with superior muscling, while avoiding those likely to be excessively fat.

Historically, scanning has been conducted around 21 weeks of age. However, in recent years, new guidance aims to focus on the weight of lambs at scanning rather than their age. Adjusting for the weight of the lamb is more commercially relevant and breeders now aim to scan lambs at around 40kg.

Within maternal breeding programmes, this enables producers to breed lambs with a better yield of meat in their carcase without generating large increases in ewe mature size.

*Signet benefits from AHDB levy money funding, including subsidising 30-40% of data analysis, ultrasound and CT scanning costs to keep recording costs low, increase industry uptake and drive genetic progress. More at [www.signetdata.com](http://www.signetdata.com).*



Using a higher ram to ewe ratio lowers the risks associated with tup fertility.



# Don't leave it too late to face up to tup infertility

By Navaratnam Partheeban, Westpoint Farm Vets **vetPartners**

## Ram fertility is essential to achieving performance targets.

Having enough fertile rams in with the ewes at tugging is crucial to bringing about a tight lambing period and making the most from an investment in genetics.

While a ram being completely infertile is quite rare, the use of sub fertile rams has a big impact on conception rates in many UK flocks. This can reduce profitability due to extended lambing

periods and additional labour requirements. For farms focused on improving flock genetics, subfertility results in not being able to make the most of a ram that was selected based on its genetic traits.

But for many, sub fertility, which means rams have less viable sperm, simply results in less lambs because a reduced number of ewes get pregnant during tugging. There are many possible reasons for this – but it is estimated that 15% of subfertility in rams goes undetected, meaning it is having a continued but invisible impact on UK sheep farming businesses.

## Disease

Infectious disease can cause infertility. The bacteria-caused disease brucellosis is a common culprit in rams. It is transmitted by sexual activity, so spreads rapidly during tugging. Examining rams ahead of tugging is the best way to avoid spreading the disease among the flock. Brucellosis causes low sperm counts, no sperm or abnormal sperm and is not treatable, so must be controlled by culling infected rams.

Any illness can trigger sub fertility in rams. For example, a lung infection can result in rams diverting energy away from producing sperm, reducing their ability to get ewes pregnant, even if they are serving them.

When it comes to sub fertility, as opposed to infertility, the good news is there is usually opportunity to resolve the issue. Properly checking ram fertility six to eight weeks before tugging usually provides enough time to resolve the problem in time for tugging. It takes six weeks for fresh semen to be produced, so it is important to allow sufficient time for this.

## Safeguard

But it is not just pre-tugging when problems can occur with ram fertility. There are occasions when rams are performing well at the start of tugging, but then stop mounting the ewes. This can be caused by the ram being overworked at the start of tugging, rapidly losing condition and/or developing a lameness.

Having more rams than technically needed is the best way to safeguard against this issue, as it is not possible to treat lameness quickly enough for the ram to continue serving ewes in their first cycle.

Generally, for first-time rams, no more than 30 ewes per ram is best. As they mature you can expect a ram to serve more ewes and increase the ratio to 40-50 ewes per ram. In a system where ewes cycles are being synchronised using hormones, one ram to ten ewes will be needed to keep the lambing period tight.



Sub fertility can go undetected, affecting conception rates.

## What does a ram MOT involve?

### Physical ram checks

An initial physical examination of the ram is the first step to detect fertility problems. Looking at a ram's body condition, to check they are neither over-fat nor too thin is a good starting point. It is then possible to adjust diet to get the rams in the right condition ready for the start of tugging. It is also important to check the eyes, as the ram needs to be able to see the ewes to do his job. Furthermore, the condition of the teeth makes a difference. The rams will lose condition during tugging, so it is important they maintain food intake to provide energy and enable them to continue working through the whole tugging period. Finally, checking the back legs is essential. The ram must be able to mount and jump, so ensure the legs are strong and there's no sign of lameness on any hoof.

### Testicle check

Checking the circumference is the most obvious indicator of a problem when examining the testicles. The ideal circumference varies between breeds, but for most it will be 30-36cm. Circumference is directly proportional to the amount of sperm produced, so under 30cm is a concern. In addition to checking circumference, palpate around each testicle to make sure it is moveable, with no lumps and bumps, heat or swelling. Testicles should be the same size as each other.

### Semen test

After checking the testicles, it is important to check the penis can be extruded. Either use a teaser ewe to see if the ram will extrude its penis, or your vet can do an electroejaculation to make sure there are no adhesions preventing the penis from coming out. Again, check everything looks normal, with no discolouration, lumps or bumps.

A semen sample can be collected during this process, which can be examined under a microscope to check the sperm count, structure, motility and mobility.

Investing in a vet-level ram MOT, which includes semen testing, provides peace of mind the rams are ready for tugging. It also enables any problems to be identified early, with time to address most issues.



Ram MOT checks enable issues to be detected before they impact on lambing.

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# Top inventions win new Sheep Event competition



In the NSA Inventions Competition, a new feature at NSA Sheep 2022, the winner in the trade section was the ClipFitter from Eadie Bros.

Developed by Brian Eadie and Professor Vince Molony the tool applies clips instead of rubber rings for castration and tailing of lambs under three months of age.

Mr Eadie explains: "The best way to describe the ClipFitter is as a modern-day burdizzo, but with removeable blades. It has the same over-centre mechanical action as the burdizzo's proven bloodless-blade but, when applying a clip tightly across the tail or scrotum, the clip remains on the animal."

## Benefits

Eadie Bros markets the product as less painful than rubber rings, with a more rapid recovery time, and clean, almost invisible scars. In March 2022 it was approved in Scotland for legal use on lambs up to three months of age – so ideal for outdoor lambing flocks where lambs aren't typically tailed and castrated at birth.

Mr Eadie says he is continuing to develop the invention, planning to offer different sized clips for different aged lambs, and confirm the biodegradability of the clips. The ClipFitter costs in the region of £175 plus 33p per plastic clip.

Second place in the inventions competition went to Cotter Agritech for its Cotter Crate system and SmartWorm app – a hardware and software solution placed in the market to help sheep farmers cut labour costs and tackle wormer resistance.

The sheep handling crate can be used on both lambs and adult sheep, where the animal is comfortably held under its own weight at operator height, without pressure being applied. Cotter Agritech says the system is simple-to-use, creates a calm handling experience for the handler and livestock, and reduced overall handling time.

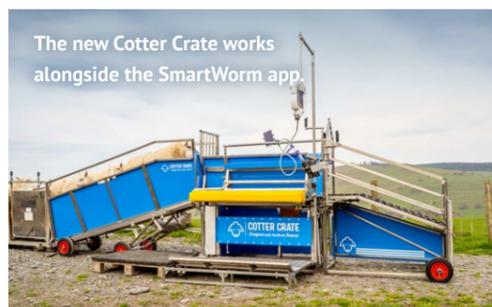
Launched alongside the crate (but also usable with other handling/weighing systems) is SmartWorm, an advanced weighing and targeted selective treatment (TST) phone app that enables weight recording, treatment management and practical application of a TST algorithm.

Third place was for the Lanati Astron cord-free shearing handpiece, from Rurtec. Coming to the market soon, the slimline handpiece will be a cordless option for dagging, crutching and shearing small sheep flocks. Rurtec says it is lightweight and high-power, and will be sold with a full accessory kit including four cutters and two combs.

More information at [eadiebros.wordpress.com](http://eadiebros.wordpress.com), [www.cotteragritech.com](http://www.cotteragritech.com) and [www.rurtec.com](http://www.rurtec.com).



The ClipFitter (inset) applies a plastic clip for tailing and castration.



The new Cotter Crate works alongside the SmartWorm app.



The Cordless Lanati Astron handpiece.

## PRODUCT AND BUSINESS NEWS

### Say goodbye to cables with wireless loadbars

Gallagher has launched the UK's first range of wireless loadbars for weighing livestock, which it says allows more rapid weighing and access to weight data, while eliminating problems caused by cabling.



Designed to be placed under any platform or weighing cage and suitable for all livestock, Gallagher says the product is waterproof with no moving parts or rubber connections, for increased durability, and is easy to maintain, transport and set-up across farm. The loadbars can link to the Gallagher Animal Performance+ App on a Smartphone or to any Gallagher weighscale via bluetooth. More at [www.gallagher.eu/en\\_gb/wireless-loadbars](http://www.gallagher.eu/en_gb/wireless-loadbars).

### Easier age specific choices when selecting boluses

Animax has overhauled its popular Tracesure range of leaching boluses, widening the range and moving to simplified product names and new, colour-coded packaging.



For sheep this is pale blue for Tracesure Lambs and a darker blue for Tracesure Sheep (ewes and rams). Animax says each variant contains the right level of supplementation for the intended age group without unnecessary components, and each is available without or with copper. More at [www.animax-vet.com/product-category/sheep](http://www.animax-vet.com/product-category/sheep).

Continues on page 54.



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### SWALEDALE FEMALE SALES

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8th Oct – Gimmer Lambs  
11th Oct – Ewes & Gimmer Shearlings  
25th Oct – Gimmer Lambs

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**Kirkby Stephen**  
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20th Oct – All Classes

**Middleton-in-Teesdale**  
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For further information, contact the Auction Marts directly.

### RAM SALE DATES 2022

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**St John's Chapel, Weardale**  
11 October  
All Classes of Rams

**Middleton in Teesdale**  
12 October  
All Classes of Rams

**Kirkby Stephen**  
Aged Rams & Ram Lambs  
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Shearling Rams  
20 – 21 October

**Hawes**  
Shearling Rams  
26 – 27 October  
Aged Rams & Ram Lambs  
3 November

All ram sale catalogues will be available at [www.swaledale-sheep.com](http://www.swaledale-sheep.com)  
Head Secretary – Rachel Buckle – 07958 540 749

Continued from page 52.

## Mobile sheep handling yard for smaller flocks

A new mobile sheep handling system, targeted specifically at small to medium sized flocks or shepherds working alone, is now available from Prattle's UK distribution partner, Allflex Livestock Intelligence.

Allflex claims the new P8's strong, lightweight construction makes removal and fitting of the transportation wheels easy for one person to do alone. With up to 16 gates carried on the chassis' integrated gate support arms, plus any additional gates inside, Allflex says it can easily be towed to hard-to-access locations and erected quickly. [More at www.allflex.co.uk](http://www.allflex.co.uk)



## Digital medicine book to aid compliance

FlockFinder is a new platform, pitched as easy-to-use software to record medical treatments, enabling industry regulation compliance.

Flockfinder says it is accessible on any smart device, and treatments can be recorded in-the-field keeping everyone up-to-date instantly. FlockFinder can also help calculate dosages, track withdrawal periods, monitor overall medication usage and produce reports to support farm inspections. A 30-day free trial is available. [More at www.flockfinder.co.uk](http://www.flockfinder.co.uk)

## New sheep marker branding fluid

Allflex Livestock Intelligence has launched a new branding fluid, marketing it as easier and more convenient for shepherds to mark and identify sheep.



The company says Flexmark adheres strongly and won't separate when applied to dry or wet fleeces, ensuring markings remain clear and easy to read over long periods. It is suitable for lowland and upland flocks, and available in red, green and blue. [More at www.allflex.co.uk](http://www.allflex.co.uk)

## Practical flock health checklist

A new checklist-based audit tool from MSD Animal Health will help practicing vets engage more proactively with UK sheep farmers, the company says.

The new Flock Health Checklist is a practical consultation platform that allows farmers to develop an action plan to address key areas influencing flock health and productivity. [More at www.msd-animal-health-hub.co.uk](http://www.msd-animal-health-hub.co.uk)

## New flock monitoring app

A Flockwatch by Herdwatch app has been launched, to allow tracking of flock performance alongside farm mapping.

The free version has an integrated weather module that provides a five-day weather forecast and four-hour rain radar. The paid-for Pro version has field management and a compliance section. [More at www.flockwatch.com](http://www.flockwatch.com)



## Sheep Farmer magazine Breed Society advertising

Available from as little as £30 per issue. Speak to Helen Roberts – see page 2 for contact details.



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# Following the flock

We visit Gloucestershire, County Fermanagh and East Sussex to catch up with NSA officeholders.

## Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chair, Gloucestershire



For more than 30 years I have used creep feed to finish lambs, being an advocate of it as a great way of getting maximum production and lambs away early.

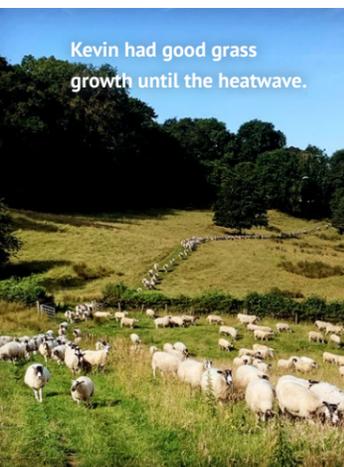
I've always been able to justify creep feeding because of the sheer quantity of sheep and the lack of grass during the summer months, as our Cotswold brash burns up. But I have often wondered how our enterprise would stack up if we reduced our numbers and cut out costs like creep feed and fertiliser. Well, this year I thought I would try.

It's gone well so far. Lambs have grown well with 100 away at good money. Lamb weights have been surprisingly good, ewe condition good and worm egg counts have been kind. There has been plenty of grass about and I've been

able to keep things moving.

It's been refreshing not being a slave to filling up the feeders and I've not missed my chats with the feed lorry driver. I'm heading into uncharted water now with rising temperatures and the south facing fields burning up. With lambs weaned, getting grazing right and keeping an eye on worm burdens becomes important. Being a little nervous I bought a few tonnes of lamb finisher pellets to finish off any entire lambs. But hopefully things will continue in the right direction and we'll have a good store lamb trade to sell the rest of the lambs into.

Kevin had good grass growth until the heatwave.



Stock is performing well for Andrew.

## Andrew Barr

NSA South East Region committee member, East Sussex



With the recent hot weather, it was a very reassuring feeling knowing the flock was shorn – or so I thought!

Charlotte, my middle year student from Plumpton College, spotted two ewes and four lambs hiding in the shade, so I was forced out of retirement to finish this year's shearing. We took the wool straight to our local British Wool collection centre. A lot easier than loading it and paying for it to be taken to Ashford, Kent, especially as I persuaded the shearers to help load it onto my flatbed trailer at the end of the day.

Lambs have been growing well due to the benign weather. We have not had a lot of rain down here, so it was a bit worrying in late spring, but we did an eight-week weight check and were pleasantly surprised.

Some bright spark at the Veterinary Medicine Directorate has decided the Sterimatic system, which we have been using for 40 years, needs to be relicensed despite no problems experienced. As many of you will have heard, Sterimatic is therefore ceasing production. Vaccine manufacturers are suggesting we swab the vaccine gun between each inoculation with cotton wool and surgical spirit. A better solution is needed, as working with wriggly lambs with an unprotected dirty needle is a serious health and safety issue for sheep, carcase and shepherd.

## Alastair Armstrong

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chair, County Fermanagh



Alastair has had a successful show season.

Restricted grass growth due to the unusually cold and wet spring continued into early summer in Northern Ireland.

With input costs spiraling out of control, we have had to micromanage everything to optimise flock performance. But June saw an improvement, with temperatures rising, and grass has recovered well in time for us to wean our mid-March born lambs.

The introduction of the Border Leicester has been great to produce Scotch Halfbreds from our Cheviot ewes. Ewe lambs are stunning, with a lot of spark and style. April born lambs were weaned throughout July, with ewes returning to the hill ground and lambs we want to keep split out. We will aim to get as many ram lambs as possible finished in August. We have also seen the return of exporting North Country Cheviot rams to Europe, with 16 leaving the farm.

The return of agricultural shows this summer is welcome. The Cheviots had a tremendous entry at our local show in Omagh, County Tyrone, where we managed to pick up several first prizes as well as the native interbreed group class for the Park type of the breed. I also had the privilege to judge at the Caithness Show, over in the Scottish Highlands, which was a nice break from the home farm. We are now looking forward to seeing what the autumn has to offer with breeding sales just around the corner.



John Buckley is an NSA member in the Republic of Ireland.



# Irish sheep farmers watching post-Brexit change with interest

By Katie James, NSA

## In practical terms, sheep farming in the Republic of Ireland has few differences with the UK.

But since the UK's departure from the EU, could changes in policy and trade opportunities mean increased future variation between us and our neighbours?

NSA member John Buckley farms 800 ewes on 1,200 acres (485ha) of mostly upland, owned and rented grazing on the Cork-Kerry border in the South West corner of Ireland. He is watching Brexit with great interest, as he does not believe sheep farmers on his side of the Irish Channel could survive if placed in the same position as UK farmers now find themselves.

## Financial aid

Support payments from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and government grant aid continue to be a necessary and vital support for Irish sheep farmers.

"The basic payment, environmental and sheep welfare schemes are essential, guaranteed sources of income, which ensures the viability of many Irish sheep farms today," comments John.

"Our system is typical of hill farming across the mountainous regions of Ireland. We run Perth-type Scottish Blackface ewes along with Wicklow Cheviot cross Blackfaces and some Texel cross Blackfaces, keeping our own replacement ewe lambs and selling the best Blackface ram lambs successfully at breeding sales."

While that might not sound dissimilar to flock set-ups in the UK, with grass-based production being the norm in both countries, it is worth

bearing in mind that John's flock is considerably bigger than the average in Ireland.

There are approximately 2.6m breeding ewes in the Republic, compared to 16m in Great Britain and Northern Ireland combined. With 31,000 sheep farms in Ireland, the average flock size is well under 100 breeding females, compared to roughly 250 ewes in the UK. In that respect, Ireland is more similar to the rest of Europe than to the UK, with flocks of more than 500-head (breeding stock plus lambs) reported to represent less than 5% of sheep enterprises in the EU.

## Support payments

In that context, John fears for the future of sheep enterprises without government support. He says: "Should financial supports diminish, the practice of rearing sheep for meat will not be a viable farming practice in Ireland, especially for those on hill farms where the margin for profit is already tight."

"There are young sheep farmers, many of whom are part time, who would like to get into the business but find it very difficult. A good level of guaranteed income support is essential to get these young farmers established."

Looking to how the UK is replacing the EU-dictated support schemes, John considers the change to be less financially advantageous.

"There seems to be a strategy in the UK of trying to replace farm income supplements, which traditionally helped support the production of high grade lamb, with grants to actively encourage the farmer to be mere custodians of the environment," he says.

"Unless the sheep farmer gets the financial support previously given through CAP, there is an

imminent fear that home produced lamb will be replaced by cheap imports. Ironically these will leave a huge carbon footprint and will not have the traceability people have come to expect and rely on," he continues.

John believes the higher financial support given in Ireland and other parts of the EU, including livestock headage payments, is the right approach - to facilitate farmers in the safe production of food and encourage them to protect the environment.

But he is all too aware this can change. John concludes: "For us, farming organisations need to keep pressure on to maintain and increase the financial support available to farmers in order to ensure the viability of the sector into the future."

Sales of quality Scottish Blackface rams are an important part of John's business.



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