

SHEEP FARMER

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End of an era at the start of political change



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

On behalf of NSA, I cannot let this moment pass without paying the highest respect to the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Her 70-year reign epitomised commitment, duty, dignity, positivity and, as many have said, she was a constant and reassuring presence in a radically changing world.

Quite simply she was a shining example to all of us and we were fortunate she loved so much of our sheep farming world, our landscapes and countryside, our livestock and, of course, the people that make our industry so special.

We are fortunate she passed her rural interests and values on to many of her descendants cascading down the generations. They are great advocates for British agriculture, the natural world and family farms, and none more than our new monarch, King Charles III, whose passion for family farms and sustainable farming is renowned.

Politics

One of the Queen's last duties was to appoint Prime Minister Liz Truss. If a week is a long time in politics, the six-week wait for the new PM and the likelihood of a new Ministerial team felt longer still. It's done and dusted now, with what resembles a new broom, and they have two years before we face a general election.

In the meantime we have a new Defra ministerial team consisting of a Secretary of State, Ranil Jayawardena, and Minister of State, Mark Spencer, who pick up the baton from George Eustice and Victoria Prentis respectively. And so the wheel keeps turning and our work starts again to get to know these new incumbents and play our part in helping them understand the industry they are in post to serve.

These Governmental changes suggest a swing to the right that will likely result in more trade liberalisation and less protection, but potentially a renewed effort to reduce red tape and regulation, and a greater emphasis on food security.

This could prove to be a positive move but there are risks to securing export trade if

we reduce regulation and standards. And should we take our eye away from the climate emergency, we will likely be paying for it further down the road. Will our future be one to satisfy farmers and the general public, or will it be back to a race to the bottom where no one wins?

I vividly remember a meeting with George Eustice in 2016 when he said his aim was to establish policies and a farming framework that were 'party political proof', meaning irrespective of governmental change, we might finally steer a steady course of permanence and stability. His aim was to hit that sweet spot of quality food production, farm viability and maintenance and enhancement of the environment, dealing with the challenges of resource protection, climate change and nature depletion.

Getting that balance right is hard and fortunately the importance of food production has been rediscovered while new schemes are still in the design phase. Farmers need stability to support long term business decisions and it's in our interests to see the policy pendulum settle in a place that encourages sustainable and multi-functional farming.

Future vision

More certain than politics is our marketplace and input costs. There is no doubt what is happening with fuel, feed and other input costs and, while we may have had a good run in the marketplace, strong prices are required to get anywhere near covering costs. The ongoing drought in many parts of the country will not help, creating uncertainty over grass recovery, a shortage of tack grazing on dairy farms, and a substantially reduced planting and yield potential for root and catch crops.

As ever, while the decisions of others will affect us, our success lies largely in our own hands. It could be a difficult winter ahead of us. But global food supplies are tight and if we continue to invest in quality sheep production and further market development we should be in a positive position as the next lambing cycle soon comes upon us.



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NSA Scottish Region welcomes interim Chair

Peter Myles, a well-known sheep farmer from Glenesk, Angus, has taken on the role of Interim Chair in NSA Scottish Region – heading up a committee of dedicated and engaged members north of the border.

Jen Craig resigned as NSA Scottish Region Chair in August and the decision was quickly taken to put one of the two NSA Trustees from the region in the position of interim chair for the foreseeable future. The regional committee met in early September and unanimously agreed for Peter to take things forward.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "Jen did an incredible job steering NSA Scottish Region through some difficult times over a period of almost four years and NSA will make sure her efforts do not go in vain. I respect her decision, which was made with the interests of NSA at heart. We now need to continue the progress she has made.

"I am very pleased Peter Myles has taken on the interim role. He will work closely with the existing regional committee, NSA Head Office and the other NSA Trustees to drive NSA activities forward in Scotland and build even further on the excellent work done by Jen."



Peter Myles.

Could you fill current NSA regional network vacancies?

The nine regions of NSA are integral to the organisation's success, feeding the views and needs of grassroots farmers into all areas of work and providing forums, events and on-farm visits for NSA members to share experiences, air opinions and gain information.

Two of these regions are currently looking for new people to take on paid administrative roles. Both NSA Central and NSA Eastern Regions are looking for new managers to organise and coordinate their regional presence and activity. NSA Scottish Region is keen to find a paid-for minute taker. *Sound interesting? Visit the NSA website or call NSA Head Office for more information. Applications close on Tuesday 18th October.*



A committed voice for the UK sheep sector

Due to increased running costs of the association, NSA membership will increase from the start of 2023 – the first increase for three years.

An additional £10 will be added to members' subscriptions (£5 on half priced under-27 memberships). NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "I hope and trust members are appreciative of our ongoing work to safeguard the future of our industry. To ensure we can continue this work to protect and position UK sheep farming, the decision has been taken to increase membership subscriptions. I'd hope you agree continued NSA membership is one of the best long-term investments you can make to secure the future of your business and the industry."

NSA continues to be a voice for UK sheep farmers.



Still time to enter NSA and Te Pari prize draw!

Have you entered NSA's fantastic prize draw to win a Te Pari Racewell HD3 sheep handling system worth £20,000?

As a joint initiative between NSA and Te Pari, any UK based sheep farmer is eligible to enter the competition. Entries close at the end of 2022, so enter today.

NSA Lambing List ready for business

Opened at the beginning of October, members can now use the NSA Lambing List to advertise for lambing help for the forthcoming season.

The lambing list works as a directory for members to 'matchmake' with students looking for experience. Members wishing to use the list can do so by going to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or contacting NSA Head Office. Anyone placing an advert is encouraged to read the updated guidelines for advice on how to use the list and best advertise your placement.



The NSA Lambing List is live.

NSA Eastern Region ARMM date confirmed

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Eastern Region will be held on Wednesday 9th November, starting at 6pm, at Heath Court Hotel, Moulton Road, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 8DY. The meeting is open to members and non-members, although only members can vote. Members not able to attend can appoint a proxy by downloading a form online. The meeting will be followed by interesting speakers and a carvery supper.

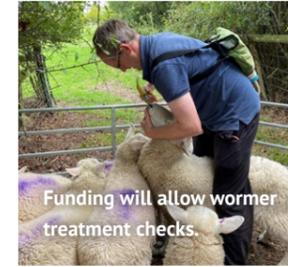
A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

English health and welfare payments

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway is set to launch in England in late autumn, with the review stage being piloted during September.

The worm treatment check is at an advanced pilot stage, which eventually will feed into the general health and welfare review available to farmers. Plans further down the line are the official launch for further testing and screening for issues identified in the review, expected in 2023.



Funding will allow wormer treatment checks.

Landscape Recovery to be piloted

Landscape Recovery (LR) is one of three strands of ELMS in England.

With the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) supporting action at farm level and local nature recovery at a local level, LR is aimed at large-scale land use change. Pilot projects are underway and NSA is extremely encouraged all have food production integrated firmly, with grazing animals a significant focus.

Agri-environment agreement holders can now apply for the SFI via the Rural Payments Agency, including those with Environmental Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship agreements. The online service is going through a process of testing to ensure the common land standards of SFI can be accessed.

Pollution regulations in Wales

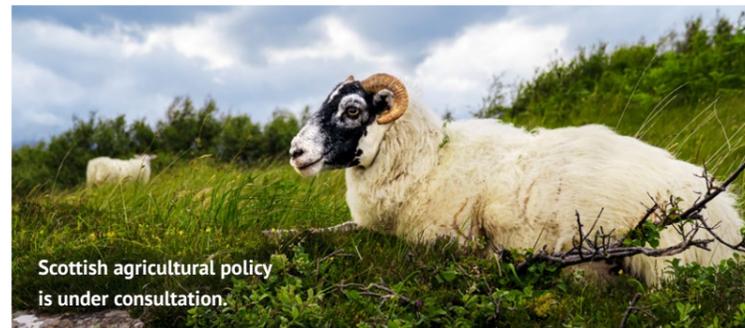
NSA is working collaboratively with industry to ensure the best outcome for farmers in Wales following the announcement of the whole Wales NVZ being upheld.

NSA has written to Welsh Ministers to address the draconian approach from the Senedd by blanket application and will continue to advocate for Welsh farmers. NSA will be hosting a technical webinar to ensure members have all the information they need.

Scottish support scheme proposals

The Scottish Agriculture Bill outlines proposals for farm support payments based on simplifying and improving retained EU law.

The Scottish Government intends to bring forward new legislation to make provision for a longer-term agricultural policy for Scotland. It has been introduced to Scottish Government and is currently out for consultation. NSA Scottish Region is working with stakeholders and committees to ensure a robust and comprehensive response is submitted on behalf of the farming industries.



Scottish agricultural policy is under consultation.



Challenges continue for exporting live animals.

Breeding animal exports

This issue continues to rumble on.

Qualivia has pulled out of the deal to invest in a border control post (BCP) across the channel in Calais, making progress still no further forward in regaining the breeding animal export trade across the short straights.

Other options are being investigated, with a vast amount of work done on alternative routes and the health, welfare and journey time implications for these. NSA continues to work with industry for a workable solution.

If you are impacted by these issues or would like more information, email policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Welsh farming schemes

NSA is working with Welsh Government, NSA Cymru/Wales Region and the Welsh Commons Forum to ensure NSA feedback on the Sustainable Farming Scheme proposal accurately reflects the views of Welsh farmers.

Over the coming months Welsh Government is hosting several codesign groups and workshops. NSA encourages those with different grazing agreements (for example, contract farming, share farming, profit shares, tenancies and those with common land) to play an active role.

Environmental delivery

With future farming schemes emerging across England and outlines under consultation in the devolved nations, funding streams for soil testing, tree planting and sustainability/carbon assessments are becoming clear.

At the same time, Red Tractor Assurance is running a research pilot with the aim of offering an environmental module as a bolt on to farm assurance.

NSA supports the view farmers should be rewarded for environmental delivery, either through a premium marketplace or through publicly funded schemes. But it believes there is a clear lack of understanding between consumer and government targets, supermarket retailer pressures and what is achievable by farmers.

NSA is in discussion with main supermarket retailers and governments to ensure any schemes are inclusive and offer opportunities for young people and new entrants who may be restricted by short term agreements.

NSA Regions

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Contact NSA Head Office**Cymru/Wales**Chair: **Kate Hovers**Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**
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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 Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

Having held the mantle for almost four years, NSA Scottish Region thanks recently resigned Chair Jen Craig for her unwavering dedication and hard work.

Significant changes have been made throughout this period to reinforce the region's resilience and commitment to the future and the region will continue to grow upon the structures Jen implemented. Peter Myles has been welcomed as NSA Scottish Region Interim Chair for the foreseeable future.

NSA Scottish Region invites members and industry supporters to its inaugural Lamb for St Andrews Day Dinner on Wednesday 30th November at the MacDonald Inchyra Hotel, Falkirk, FK2 0YB. Tickets must be bought in advance via the NSA Scottish Region website. Please contact me if you have any queries.



Jen Craig.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region held a committee meeting in September to begin planning regional events and, with this summer's dry weather causing concern for forage availability, decided an informal evening discussing practical advice for winter feeding with forage and nutrition experts would be most useful.

The meeting in mid-November will also have an update from this year's and past NSA Next Generation Ambassadors. It will be a great opportunity for any younger sheep enthusiasts to come along and find out more about opportunities with NSA. Refreshments will be provided. Look out for details in the NSA Weekly Email Update and online.

NSA Eastern Region

The region met for a much-enjoyed farm walk in September, in the impressive grounds of Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire.

Estate Shepherd Nick Smith gave attendees an insightful talk while showing them around the flock of 1,600 North Country Mules due to be put to Charollais and Suffolk rams this autumn. Thanks go to Nick and the team at Belvoir for an interesting afternoon.

Attention now turns to the NSA Eastern Region Annual Member's Meeting, which will be taking place at Heath Court Hotel, Newmarket, on Wednesday 9th November. We hope to see many regional members, especially given that the meeting will also celebrate the many years Jonathan Barber has served as regional manager before retiring this autumn.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

NSA Northern Ireland Region is gearing up to host a series of farmer meetings to refresh and encourage best practice on the benefits of a healthy flock.

Taking the lead on this are Parklands Vets, with support from MSD Animal Health. Flock health is critical to counteract price increases and efficiency pressures focused around the sheep sector's carbon footprint. Locations are yet to be confirmed but the meetings will include key speakers on efficient management of a sustainable sheep flock, including discussion on data collection.

NSA South West Region enjoyed viewing mixed enterprises at its recent farm visit.



NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

Members from across the region and beyond were treated to a farm walk laid on by M. and J. Moulard and Sons at Cricket St Thomas in Dorset.

Richard and family led an informative tour of their sheep and cattle enterprises, highlighting plans for future improvements. Thank you to Richard, his family, Emily Gascoigne and Synergy Farm Health.

This year's NSA South West Ram Sale also proved a continued success with a good crop of entries. Thanks to Kivells auctioneers and all those involved in pulling the event together.

As we move into the autumn and winter, we will look to hold one or two further events across the region.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will have a stand at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair on Monday 28th and Tuesday 29th November - all members and friends are welcome to call by for a cuppa.

NSA Welsh Sheep will be on the Tuesday 16th May 2023 at Red House, Aberhafesp, Newtown, SY16 3HH. Stand applications and sponsorship packages will open at the end of October. The NSA Cymru/Wales Region Annual Members Meeting will be held in February 2023.



NSA Cymru/Wales region will once again welcome members to the stand at the Welsh Winter Fair in November.

NSA Northern Region has an insightful visit to British Wool at Bradford.



NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

It was great to see members join us in August for a farm walk with W. and W. Patterson at Coupland Beck Farm, Abbeley, Cumbria.

Thanks to Will and Claire for showing us around their different farm enterprises. September brought a visit to British Wool's Bradford headquarters with a tour to see how the wool is graded after leaving the farm, the sheer volumes of wool processed and an insight into the auction system. The afternoon brought a visit to Haworth Scouring Plant, highlighting what happens next.

Plans are well underway for NSA North Sheep at Bradford House Farm, Ponteland, Northumberland, on Wednesday 7th June 2023.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

NSA South East Region would like to invite members to attend its third farm walk this year, on Tuesday 25th October from 10.30am.

We will visit two contrasting West Berkshire mixed farms - Rushall Farm, Bradfield, before lunch at the West Berkshire Brewery, and then a large arable estate with sheep grazing cover crops. Places are limited and food needs to be ordered mid-October. Contact me to avoid disappointment.

The region successfully held its inaugural ram sale in early September at Thame Market. *Full report on pages 6 and 7.*

All rings attracted interest at the NSA South West Ram Sale.



Ram sale reports

Powerful rams in demand at NSA South West ram sale

Auctioneers Kivells reported buyers were looking for powerful, quality rams and were prepared to pay for them at the mid-August sale at Exeter Livestock Centre.

Topping the sale at 2,100gns was the Texel show champion, a shearling ram from Phil and Lesley Martyn-Uglov of Launceston, Cornwall, who sold others strongly with a 100% clearance for their 15 rams entered.

A ram lamb from Robert Hopper, Tiverton, Devon, led the way in the Suffolk ring with 2,000gns, while the shearlings were topped at 1,300gns for one from E.W. Quick and family, Crediton, Devon, and Miss N. Hartwright.

Crossbred sales

Chartex rams took the top price in the crossbred ring at 950gns, also from the Quick family. They had a tremendous sale, also topping the Charollais ring at 1,200gns. Close behind was the Charollais show champion from Gerald Burrough of Honiton, Devon, selling at 1,000gns.

A sale record for a Border Leicester was achieved, with a shearling ram from M.J. and V.M. Pile, Barnstaple, Devon, selling at 1,600gns. Shearling ewes from Sue Martyn, Launceston, Cornwall, sold to 680gns.

A Beltex shearling from Lorna Gregory, Launceston, Devon, sold for 1,000gns, while Dutch Spotted sheep were welcomed to the sale for the first time and saw females from J. Baker of Exeter, Devon, being sold to 600gns. Lleyms ran to 600gns and, in the non-MV ring, M.C. and K.D. Yeo sold Berrichons to 750gns.



The Texel show champion from the Martyn-Uglows sold to 2,100gns.



Suffolk shearlings topped at 1,100gns at the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale.

Quality on offer at NSA Eastern Region sales

There was a real buzz at the NSA Eastern Region Rugby Ram Sale in late August, with a packed ringside of eager buyers ensuring tremendous trade.

There was a smaller entry than previous years, but the quality forward remained good and resulted in 110 mainly Texel, Charollais and Suffolk rams being sold (a 75% clearance rate). The quality of stock was reflected in the price, with Texel and Charollais rams performing well, averaging well over 600gns a piece.

Buckinghamshire-based Andrew Geary judged the rams before the sale. His overall champion was a pen from Garfield Stephens of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. Mr Stephens went on to also achieve the top price on the day. He sold a Texel shearling ram at 1,100gns to N.K. Butcher from Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire.

Melton Mowbray

The second NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale, held in mid-September as part of the Melton Midlands Sheep Fair at Melton Mowbray Market, saw a record-breaking number of entries, giving bidders a good number of excellent rams to select from.

The pre-sale show was judged by Andrew Needham of Rutland, who found his champion pen from the Charollais breed of regular supporters C. and D. Timm of Pickering, North Yorkshire. They went on to top the sale with a Charollais shearling ram selling to 1,200gns.

The reserve champion pen of sheep came from the ram lambs, again Charollais, from the Galtres Flock, Skewsby, York.

Suffolk shearlings topped at 1,100gns for Garner and Son, Horncastle, Lincolnshire, while the show of Texel rams sold to a high of 1,000gns for local breeder Garfield Stephens.

Crossbred rams, although last in the catalogue, still saw plenty of demand and topped for R. and B. Smith of Towcester, Northamptonshire, with Texel cross Beltex rams running to 900gns.



Champion pen from C. and D. Timm.

Record breaking prices seen at NSA Wales & Border Main sale

Just minutes into the bidding at the NSA Wales & Border Main Sale in late September, a Bluefaced Leicester shearling sold for a record 26,000gns, quickly followed by a Texel sold for 24,000gns – clearly a strong sale of quality of tups.

The delayed sale at the Royal Welsh Showground, put back by a week due to the royal funeral, reached just under £2m turnover with 2,795 sheep sold, 88% of the number forward. The overall average was slightly up on last year at £699.87.

Chair Graham Jones said there had been excellent results across the board with a few star performers. He added: "It's nice to see that people coming here for years were able to turn around and buy replacements for their flocks. I feel the trade reflected the demand for heavier lamb. It was an excellent day with a good atmosphere."

Records exceeded

The day was marked by the record price achieved by Vale of Glamorgan farmers, Tudor and Janet Harris and their Bonvilston flock. Their 26,000gns sale exceeded their own 12,000gns record from 2018.



The record-breaking Bonvilston Bluefaced Leicester.

Mr Harris was ecstatic: "He's a yearling, out of semen my daughters bought me as a Christmas present, Graig yr Orsedd from Logie Durro. We have a full brother at home, a year younger."

Buyer Hazel Brown has the Leadburnlea flock of 70 pedigree ewes in Midlothian, Scotland. She's a regular at NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale, coming for the range of high quality Bluefaced Leicester sheep. She had previously bought the 12,000gns ram with one other breeder in 2018.

A Bluefaced Leicester ram lamb from Wyn and Siwan Harries' Hope Flock later sold to Scott Thomason, for their Piel View Flock at Walney Island, Cumbria, for 15,000gns. The breed champion made 13,500gns, from Alan McClymont.

The Texel supreme champion sold for 24,000gns, a yearling from Paul Tippetts' Shropshire-based flock that dispersed its females earlier in the year. Wilodge Ex Factor went to Ted Fox, Jonathan Watson and Michael James.

Mr Fox said: "We haven't seen a shearling tup like this all year. He's pure muscle, good on his legs, gets his head up well and is as long as a snake. He's in a class of his own. We didn't need a tup this time, but I couldn't resist."

Mr Tippetts was delighted: "He's from a



The Texel supreme champion sold for 24,000gns.

homebred ewe, by a tup called Teiglun Crackerjack. We always thought he had the x-factor and hoped he would make good money, but you never know at an auction."

Top prices

The top priced Charollais, a shearling, sold for 3,800gns from Probert and Sons' Mortimer flock to D. Williams, Betws, Anglesey. The top priced Suffolk yearling ram was sold by Jim and Nikki Hartwright, from their Springfields flock, for 3,500gns to Aled Williams, Mon Flock, Anglesey. A Suffolk ram lamb sold from Glenys Morgan's Llangeview flock went for 1,750gns.

The top price North Country Cheviot was from N. and C.M. Barratt, Conover, Shrewsbury, whose yearling tup sold for 2,100gns to Alan Jones, Corwen, Denbighshire.

The top priced Lleyn sold for 1,250gns, a Blue Texel ewe lamb for 3,200gns, a Berrichon ram lamb for 1,650gns, a Dutch Spotted ewe lamb for 1,090gns, a South Country Cheviot for 1,400gns, a Brecknock Hill Cheviot for 1,450gns and a Badger Face for 350gns.

First NSA sale at Thame a success

The inaugural NSA South East Region Ram Sale was held in conjunction with Thame Farmers Mart's second annual breeding ewe sale in September.

Entries exceeded expectations for the first ever sale, with 81 shearlings and ram lambs offered to a packed ring of potential buyers. Just over 60 rams found homes to an average of £498.

Suffolk shearlings met strong demand, topping at £900 for a shearling from Russo Suffolks, based at Tandridge, Surrey. Texel shearlings topped the sale at £960 from local breeders M. and L. Blakemore. Holton Mill Farm, another local producer, topped at £500 for its Lleyms.

Charollais shearlings sold to £740 for Cecil Thomas, Wolston, Coventry, who also sold ram

lambs at £400. The Kent-based Weeksland Charollais flock achieved the best price for ram lambs, topping at £500 and averaging £460.

Lively atmosphere

James Goffin led the enthusiastic NSA South East Region committee members who got the sale off the ground. He comments: "A lively atmosphere turned into lively bidding on the day, with bids coming thick and fast on most of the rams."

"On behalf of the committee, I would like to express my thanks to all at Thame who looked after us and to the vendors who travelled across many counties to be a part of this inaugural sale. We hope to see you all again at next year."



The inaugural NSA South East Region Ram Sale exceeded expectations.

Welsh future farming schemes need to be less prescriptive

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer

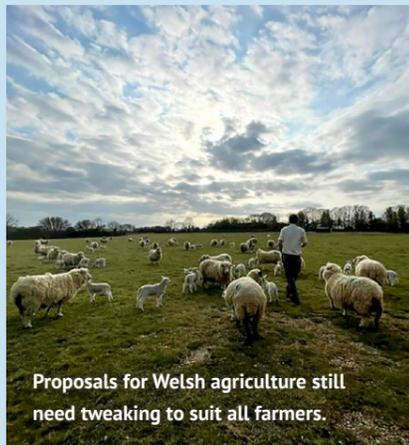


I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the plea for members in NSA Cymru/Wales Region to get involved in the Welsh Government's codesign process for the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

The codesign survey is open until the end of the month and it is important as many farmers as possible participate to ensure the proposed actions are practical and can be delivered – now and for coming generations.

Detailed response

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be putting a detailed response in too. This will include challenging the 10% figure on tree cover. We are all aware trees play a part in the sustainability process, but they need to be in the right place and that will not suit everyone's way of farming.



Proposals for Welsh agriculture still need tweaking to suit all farmers.

The current proposals need a robust alternative, which could lie in better soil and grassland management that will enable us to maintain our high standard of food production in a sustainable way and look after the environment.

We will also be asking for more detail on the universal actions, as from a first look not all farms will be in a position to complete them and a pick-and-mix list could be a better approach for producers to claim some sort of payment.

Tackling scab

In other news, NSA Cymru/Wales Region is heavily involved in the tender process for the All Wales Sheep Scab Eradication Programme. Funding to tackle sheep scab in the region would be a welcome injection.

Respond to the Sustainable Farming Scheme codesign survey at www.gov.wales/sustainable-farming-scheme-guide.

Pressures mount as costs increase

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



With on-farm input costs rising, NSA Northern Ireland Region appreciates Daera Minister Edwin Poots' announcement on prompt payment of farm support.

At least 97% of local farmers will receive the funding six weeks earlier than the previous year's payment. This will provide the necessary financial support for farming families and assist cash flow, helping to sustain viability.

After highlighting the inequality of support for the sheep sector in future agricultural scheme proposals announced by Daera, NSA NI is pleased to see the development of a sheep sector taskforce to negotiate a fairer package. In the short term the group will assist Daera in creating a more even system of support for the ruminant sector. Long term it could act to advise on other matters pertaining to the sheep sector.



Quicker support will help NI farmers.

Rising costs

NSA NI Region is also part of another recently-formed taskforce, this one focusing on rising costs. It is led by CAFRE and set up to aid and advise farmers on how best to deal with spiralling costs. For anyone finding increasing costs an issue, the CAFRE website has useful information, advice and tools for assessing on-farm options.

Call to action to steer farming policy

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



The long-awaited Scottish Agriculture Bill consultation has now been published – but there is still considerable uncertainty.

While many expected more in-depth measures and answers from the paper, this consultation must be seen as an enabling tool to provide Scottish Ministers the powers to implement measures and initiatives going forward. The value of having a defined starting point in terms of progression and aspiration is recognised.

Inclusive schemes

NSA Scottish Region advocates for practical solutions that can be implemented on all farms to allow a standard level of conformity while ensuring farm businesses can benefit not only for food production but for other objectives for Scottish agriculture.

Our farmers and crofters deserve recognition and reward for their role in producing high quality food, in terms of both animal health and welfare and nutritional value, at the very least. Not only are they custodians of the globally-envied Scottish landscape, but they also strive for bettering their own enterprises in line with government policy time and time again.

Thus, the main opportunity going forward is to continue to build successful and profitable businesses that will stand the test of time, but also improve public trust and align with climate change mitigation targets and halt biodiversity decline.

The Scottish Government has announced a series of face-to-face and virtual consultation events in October and November, focusing on the Agriculture Bill and specific themes within. Please be sure to join one.

Participation needed

A notable number of non-farming respondents participated in the 2021 'Agricultural transition in Scotland' consultation. Stakeholders will be engaging fully in this process but it's imperative that farmers and crofters participate to ensure policy is fit for the future, communicate the importance of food production and protect future food security, combating the high number of responses from those with non-farming interests.

This is one of the very few opportunities to make a difference to our national farming policy and we cannot afford to get it wrong. Our farming practices are becoming ever more specialised and, for now at least, input costs do not look to be reducing any time soon. Ultimately, the decisions made now will affect all of us for many years to come.



The draft Agricultural Bill is a starting point.



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Commitment, policy direction and continuity are needed to guide the political flock.



Significant parliamentary changes set to rock the agricultural boat

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

A new Prime Minister, Secretary of State or Farming Minister always brings significant change – so all three changing at once will have far reaching consequences for UK agriculture.

But what will the new incumbents mean specifically for the sheep sector?

Before getting the top job as PM, Liz Truss's lengthy leadership campaign saw her pledge an array of measures claimed to make farming prosper, including expanding the seasonal worker scheme, cutting red tape, protecting the natural environment and holding water companies to account over their role in pollution.

Prime Minister Truss has promised to slash taxes from day one and scrap outdated EU laws still on the British statute book but, although we have seen a significant energy price cap, there has been little mention of agriculture in the first weeks of her role - despite numerous calls to prioritise the agri-food supply chain and to ensure it is given priority energy supply this winter.

Export risks

Many will look upon the cutting of red tape with glee, but it could push us further away from EU standards and potentially jeopardise our biggest export market for UK lamb. Which leads us nicely to our new Defra Secretary of State, Ranil Jayawardena.

Mr Jayawardena comes to the post from a stint in the Department of International Trade and has

been a keen supporter of free trade agreements (FTAs), most notably indicating 'the balance was right' when it came to the Australia-UK deal.

Although relatively unknown in the agricultural sphere, unlike his predecessor George Eustice, he states he is looking forward to tackling issues. He is quoted as saying: "From food security and supporting our farmers, to water quality and economic growth for our rural communities, there is much to do."



New Prime Minister Liz Truss.

He claims to be keen to deliver a thriving British food industry, a cleaner environment and to maximise the benefits of Brexit. How this might be translated into policy is yet to be seen, but voting records indicate a consistent approach to voting against climate change measures, which many will find concerning and would be another change of direction from the last few years.

The last appointment is the successor to Victoria Prentis as Defra Minister for Farming, Mark Spencer. Mr Spencer's previous role was as leader of the House of Commons, along with a

short stay on Parliament's Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Many will be encouraged to know Mr Spencer has a long farming history, having studied agriculture before joining his family's farming business in Nottinghamshire. He was also heavily involved in YFC.

Although any change in government direction is yet to be outlined, it's known that in his time as leader of the house, when the International Trade Committee called on the Government to extend the 21-day period to allow MPs more time to examine the Australia trade agreement, he rejected the call, along with International Trade Secretary Anne Marie-Trevelyan.

Trade focus

What does this all this mean for sheep farming? It looks like we're heading toward a more trade orientated landscape, which could provide vast opportunities if British produce is at the heart of any future decisions.

However, especially important to our industry is ensuring domestic food markets remain a priority, with investment in our own food supply chains, infrastructure and producers, along with ensuring our long-term export and trading partners aren't abandoned in the urgency to hit the ground running with new FTAs.

NSA's position, which it is communicating at every opportunity, is that what is needed now is some commitment, policy direction and continuity from the Government. Whatever happens, we could be in for more changes in the years to come.

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Further complications for moving stock to Northern Ireland from Great Britain

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

A threat to Northern Ireland's maedi visna-free status earlier this year, combined with the difficulties brought about by Brexit, mean importing sheep from Great Britain (GB) to Northern Ireland (NI) is difficult.

To understand why this is, it is important for buyers and sellers on both sides of the Irish Sea to look at the various pieces of a complicated jigsaw.

Since Brexit, GB is a 'third country' in EU terms and NI is effectively part of the EU in relation to sanitary and phytosanitary controls. As a result, any sheep (and goats) moving from GB to NI require an EU Export Health Certificate (EHC) instead of the previously used GB to NI EHCs; the previous show and sale import licencing arrangements no longer apply.

In addition, sheep entering NI need to be scrapie genotyped and either considered resistant to scrapie (group 1) or be part of the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme (SMS). To help transition, SRUC implemented a Scrapie Qualifying Scheme (SQS) to allow breeding flocks to achieve temporary status within the SMS and export to NI only (not any other EU member states) before achieving full SMS status after three years. The SQS was open only until 31st December 2021 so is not an option for flocks now looking for a quick-fix to the problem.

Disease surveillance

Separate to the Brexit situation and linked to the MV breakdown in February 2022, Northern Ireland has put in additional steps to maintain its MV free status and guard against brucellosis. Daera is now sampling all new arrivals as part of a surveillance programme.

- Sheep from non-MV accredited flocks are sampled on arrival to NI and isolated for five months after importation or until a second MV test has been taken and returned negative.
- Sheep from MV accredited flocks in GB are sampled on arrival to NI.
- Sheep from mainland Europe are also sampled for brucellosis, bluetongue and contagious agalactia on arrival.

This combination of Brexit and MV rules means sheep entering NI from GB land at the port of Larne and the person responsible for the animals reports to a portal inspector. All consignments are pre-notified to Daera on the TRACES-NT system using a common health entry document.

But how does any of this work in practice? Be it high value pedigree stock (mostly rams but some females) or commercial females, the answer is a previously thriving trade has been hugely curtailed.

GB sales

Due to the health status requirements and the unlikely event of any sales registering as export assembly centres with adequate separation facilities, we will get to the end of this breeding sale season without many, if any, pedigree animals bought at GB marts by NI producers.

However, like the commercial female trade, this could in theory happen if NI buyers are prepared to buy animals and arrange for them to be held in GB in isolation while the MV, scrapie and brucella (males only), checks are completed. This creates a risk if animals were to be found positive, and buyers and sellers need to fully understand the trading relationship and liability. Direct off-farm movements from GB to NI, of suitably health certified animals, can take place



– although isolation periods need to fit with breeding programmes.

For commercial females the same situation exists and, while there may be cases where suitably health certified animals can be moved direct, it is more likely the traditional trade in ewe lambs may see interest from NI buyers to those sellers who are prepared to hold the lambs in GB, in isolation, before they are old enough for MV testing.

This situation has been the case for some time but, now these sheep also need to be scrapie genotyped, or from a flock in the SMS (including SQS). There is a higher risk involved in this trade due to lower engagement from traditional hill flocks in the National Scrapie Plan.

In all cases, sellers and buyers are well advised to talk to their breed societies, marketing agents, APHA and SRUC's Premium Sheep & Goat Health Scheme if they intend to engage in this trade.

Meanwhile if you're moving sheep from NI to GB things are much simpler, with exports needing an EHC covering two scenarios; exporting from the premises of origin or exporting via an export assembly centre.

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Holding stock in GB could help overcome isolation barriers.

Activity during Love Lamb Week was helped by NSA ambassadors.



Love Lamb Week shares positive stories of UK sheep farming

By Katie James, NSA

In the first week of September, farmers, retailers and social media influencers came together to celebrate the sustainable credentials of sheep farming as part of Love Lamb Week 2022.

The annual campaign is supported by NSA, UK levy boards and farming unions and once again attracted high profile attention from celebrity chefs, found publicity in national media and encouraged shoppers to add different lamb cuts to their weekly shopping baskets.

Love Lamb Week was first established in 2015 by late Cumbrian sheep farmer Rachel Lumley. Its reputation has grown since, ensuring it is now firmly fixed in the sheep farming calendar at a time of peak supply of UK produced lamb.

Showcasing lamb

NSA Communications Manager Katie James comments: "Once again, Love Lamb Week has provided a great opportunity to showcase all that is fantastic about our industry. NSA called on members and the wider sheep sector to be vocal during the week sharing stories of their sheep farming systems, the environmental management that goes hand in hand with farming, and also the delicious, nutritious red meat that is the final result of all of this hard work. And our members responded! The sector should take pride from the way in which it promoted itself during the week-long campaign."

Having presented different campaign recipe idea's earlier in the summer at NSA Sheep 2022, the two Love Lamb Lambassadors were in action once again, keeping the campaign's social platforms busy by sharing fantastic stories throughout the week.

Mrs James continues: "Special recognition must go to our Lambassadors, who worked tirelessly to keep the Love Lamb social accounts active and engaging all week. Further industry promotion from the UK levy boards will now continue into the autumn as several high-profile campaigns carry on where Love Lamb Week left off."

#LoveLambWeek

Love Lamb Ambassador and Leicestershire sheep farmer Amy Matravers comments: "Thank you to everyone who engaged with #LoveLambWeek. It was great to see huge variety in the posts on social media, including recipes, daily farming tasks and also restaurant meals available with British lamb. I'd love to keep the momentum going all year round, promoting our produce with #LoveLamb."

Ernie Richards, a fellow Lambassador and sheep farmer from the Herefordshire/Powys border, adds: "I'm really proud to be part of the ongoing Love Lamb campaign. Being a Love Lamb Ambassador, not only for Love Lamb Week, but all year, has been brilliant to promote and educate about UK sheep farming. This year's campaign appears to have really inspired the sheep farming community to get involved."



Promotional stickers were used in major supermarkets.

As well as social media being a popular platform for farmers to promote the campaign, coverage of the week was found in several national newspapers with special recipe features being included - and even a double page advertorial piece in the weekend's i newspaper. Stickers promoting the campaign were placed on the packaging of most British lamb products sold in major retailers during the week.

The week proved perfectly placed to highlight further the British Heritage Sheep scheme, following NSA's promotion of this to foreign visitors at the NSA Sheep Event. The scheme aims to commercialise historic native breeds by promoting the ABC of their sheep meat - age, breed and countryside of the animals reared.

Meet the Love Lamb Ambassadors on page 18, and find out more at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/love-lamb and www.heritageweek.org.

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Marketing round up

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

Starting them young with Northern Ireland lamb



LMC will launch the third tranche of its Good Honest Food advertising campaign this autumn to demonstrate lamb and beef as versatile red meats providing healthy, nutritious meal solutions for the whole family.

A recent review has confirmed the positive impact of the advertising campaign on consumer perceptions of Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) lamb. There has been an increase in the regularity of lamb purchase and consumption in Northern Ireland, which correlates with those reporting to have seen the campaign.

More than two thirds of consumers are actively identifying NIFQA lamb, highlighting the important role promotion is playing in supporting local farmers and processors, and improving consumer perceptions of red meat.

Despite positive consumer perceptions, data on how age impacts regularity of purchasing and eating lamb has highlighted an opportunity to raise its profile among younger cohorts. To help elevate lamb as a regular centrepiece choice for mealtimes, LMC has created a host of tasty, quick and value for money recipes using lamb.

Each year, LMC communicates face-to-face with almost 10,000 pupils at primary and secondary level via a growing educational programme that includes school cookery demonstrations. This initiative delivers positive messaging on the environmental, health and versatility credentials of NIFQA lamb, while inviting pupils to sample lamb dishes.

The popular Meat4Schools competition provides schools with an opportunity to win a meat hamper, removing the cost barrier to using lamb in cookery classes.

LMC strives to promote NIFQA lamb through annual collaborative initiatives such as Love Lamb Week, in addition to the host of internal activities.



LMC offers lamb hampers to schools to promote, educate and inspire the next generation.



The QMS cred campaign was successful in reaching 85% of the younger generation.

QMS concentrating on 'cred' this autumn



Following a successful spring/summer marketing campaign that reached 85% of 18-39 year olds in Scotland, QMS is continuing to build 'cred' with autumn activity.

To the target market, cred means credibility, sustainability, local, high animal welfare and a trust in the Scotch brands.

Research shows 93% of shoppers agree Scotch labels mean support for local farmers, 92% that the meat is produced to higher animal welfare standards and 59% that it is more environmentally friendly.

The expanding market of flexitarians who are choosing to eat less but better quality meat is driven primarily by the younger demographic, and QMS is viewing the growing interest in sustainable food choices as an opportunity, rather than a threat.

QMS has a long-term opportunity to align with growing trends and lifestyles in which sustainability and respectful rearing are high on the agenda through brand positioning 'meat with integrity'. That said, QMS is also aware fears around the rising cost of living is having an impact on shopping habits.

The last two years demonstrate how quickly consumer habits can change, so when planning advertising and marketing campaigns, a firm eye is kept on the long-term objectives, but with short-term flexibility enabled.

This will be seen in the autumn @MakeItScotch campaign, which is likely to coincide with concerns around greater energy costs as winter approaches, by focusing on value cuts, batch cooking, utilising leftovers, encouraging switching from chicken to pork but also seeing opportunities in trading up for steak night at home as consumers reduce dinner occasions out.

Hearty, nutritious and affordable meals will be showcased via bold social media ads, reaching out to the younger audience, but retailer partnerships, billboards and prime-time TV advertising will also remain key in encouraging consumers to select Scotch.

National campaign champions love for UK-produced lamb



The first week of September saw the return of the increasingly popular Love Lamb Week to shine a light on the sustainability of UK sheep production, while reminding consumers of the exceptional taste and quality UK lamb brings to the dinner table.

Now in its eighth year, farmers continue to show their support for the initiative by sharing positive stories across social media of British farming highlighting the UK's climate and landscape as an ideal place to produce lamb sustainably.

As part of the campaign, AHDB shared budget-friendly and delicious recipes to inspire more people to cook with lamb. Other promotion included in-store advertising across six retailers, social media and print advertising, point of sale merchandise for butchers and farm shops, free of charge farmgate banners and downloadable graphics for sharing.

At the end of the week, AHDB maintained momentum by launching the next bout of the We Eat Balanced consumer campaign, highlighting the importance of a balanced diet. It promotes meat and dairy as a



AHDB campaign showcased lamb recipes to encourage consumption.

source of vitamin B12, which isn't naturally present in plant-based foods, highlights the world-class production standards of UK agriculture and stresses that red meat and dairy from Britain is among the most sustainable in the world.

The campaign can be seen across a variety of platforms, including major supermarkets and will feature nine-year-old Nancy and her grandfather, who proved a hit last time with consumers, particularly young adults – a demographic that's been harder to reach historically.

The last burst of the campaign in early 2022 was seen by nearly 24m UK households delivering important messages around health, sustainability and Britain's world-class food and farming standards.

Famous foodies team up to promote Welsh Lamb



HCC always ramps up its domestic marketing in autumn, given the plentiful supply of Welsh Lamb at this time.

Leading chefs including television favourite Francesco Mazzei, double Michelin-starred Gareth Ward and BBQ fanatic Chris 'Flamebaster' Roberts, are all massive Welsh Lamb fans. Francesco has fronted a HCC social media campaign alongside Chris, as well as performing demonstrations and cooking at summer festivals and events. Gareth is offering a night and tasting menu experience at his restaurant in West Wales, where Welsh Lamb regularly features.

Digital targeting and social media campaigns are at the forefront of promotional work. HCC works with influencers who are well positioned to showcase Welsh Lamb products and the story of Welsh Lamb to both sustainability-conscious consumers and foodies.

Seasonal recipes are created every quarter by HCC to reflect the latest consumer trends and offer innovative meal solutions using a variety of Welsh Lamb cuts. Data suggests consumers often find cooking with lamb intimidating, as they are unsure what to do with certain cuts, so creating step-by-step recipes is key work.

Recipes are distributed through the HCC Butchers' Club, supermarkets, at events and through HCC's social media and webpages. This season features internationally inspired keema dishes and winter warmers like lamb and butter bean stew.

HCC will also be making the most of Wales being on the world-stage during the football world cup. Qatar is a growing export market for Welsh Lamb so, with the help of Welsh Government funding, HCC will be taking advantage of a sharpened focus on Wales during that time.



Chefs Chris 'Flamebaster' Roberts and Francesco Mazzei.

Trademark adds value to British wool



The British Wool licensing scheme continues to grow, with 14 brands signing up this year and a total of 87 now able to use the shepherds crook trademark.

Haldi Kranich-Wood of British Wool says: "The interest has been really encouraging and we have many more manufacturers and retailers in the pipeline wanting to join us."

High street retailer Next is one of the latest brands to sign up to the scheme for a collection of knitwear, alongside duvet brands Slumberdown and Snuggledown, mattress manufacturer Vispring and two carpet brands Kingsmead and Crucial Trading.

"All licensees undertake a thorough external auditing process where the British wool content is tracked through the supply chain right back to the wool merchant," she continues, adding that licensees must use a minimum percentage of British wool in their products.

"The licensee scheme and our marketing activity has been designed to increase demand and, in turn, returns paid to farmer members. There is a range of marketing support tools for brand partners, including social media, the British Wool Shop where they can sell products via a British Wool platform, brand exposure at exhibitions and agricultural shows, and press coverage.

"The last two consumer campaigns have been huge successes, gaining exposure in a range of national publications. There is lots of activity planned for October's 'Wool Month', ensuring the continued promotion of British wool to consumers."



Licensing enables supply chain traceability.

Love Lamb Ambassadors help boost the 2022 campaign



By Katie James, NSA

Amy Matravers from Loughborough, Leicestershire, and Ernie Richards from Hay on Wye on the Herefordshire/Powys border, have spent the past 12 months growing the online presence of Love Lamb Week – with great success.

Love Lamb Week was established in 2015 by Cumbria based sheep farmer Rachel Lumley in response to poor lamb prices, with the intention of boosting domestic consumption. After Rachel sadly passed away in 2020 the campaign needed some new faces to raise awareness, continuing her legacy and honouring her name and ambition to improve the nation's taste for delicious lamb.

Increased audience

Amy and Ernie took over the Love Lamb social accounts on Facebook and Twitter in October 2021 and, since then, have attracted a significant number of new followers to the accounts, increasing the audience for their engaging posts that share everyday farming life as well as providing inspiration to consumers with cooking tips and recipe ideas.

They also took to the stage in the NSA Sheep Event cookery theatre this summer to share a number of delicious lamb recipes they have tried and enjoyed during their time as Love Lamb Ambassadors.

First generation

Ernie Richards is a first-generation farmer working as an employed shepherd on an upland farm with 1,000 pedigree Lleyn ewes, working with the Morris family. The high-health-status closed flock produces up to 300 breeding shearlings annually and finishes all entire ram lambs, selling them deadweight for maximum return.

Ernie enjoys promoting sustainable sheep farming and showing people lamb can be a part of a healthy and balanced diet.

Ernie Richards took on the Love Lamb Ambassador role in 2021.



Q&A with Lambassador Ernie Richards

What was the most effective message shared during Love Lamb Week 2022?

Definitely the message highlighting how sustainable lamb production is and how it is so well suited to the British climate. It was very well received as the public are increasingly look for environmentally friendly options.

A lot of the engagement was also received from people sharing when they had chosen to purchase lamb from local farm shops and butchers, with many showing their different recipes and how they were surprised to find lamb to be such a versatile meat.

Have you noticed a growth in awareness of the campaign since you became Love Lamb Ambassadors in 2021?

Love Lamb week has an increased following on social media channels. The engagement on Instagram is particularly great, and there are many followers sharing recipes, farming stories and their love for lamb with the campaign.

Even though a lot of engagement on social media has been people sharing quick meal ideas, it's interesting to see the amount of people commenting saying that although new recipe ideas are good they still enjoy the famous Sunday lamb roast the most.

What do you think would encourage even more lamb consumption?

I think more promotion of how to use lamb in cost effective ways with less waste needs to be encouraged, especially as things get tighter financially for the consumer. People need to feel they are getting more value for money. We need to encourage the public to try cheaper cuts of lamb that can be used quickly, and more frequently.

Promoting different cooking techniques could be a good way to show the consumers how to use lamb effectively in larger meals that can be portioned up, frozen and eaten at a later date, both encouraging low-cost eating and less waste.

Which lamb recipe was your favourite during Love Lamb Week?

I made a sweet chilli lamb stir fry with lamb leg steaks, vegetables and noodles. It was quick and simple to make with no waste. It was a great meal and a favourite even with my little boy Harry!



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NSA supports next generation with knowledge exchange activities



Having already benefitted from delivery sessions on flock health, grassland management and the UK sheep supply chain, the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors came together again at the end of September.

This final instalment for the 2022 cohort concentrated on personal and business development and included interesting farm visits to previous and future NSA North Sheep hosts around Hexham, Northumberland.

Often a highlight of the ambassador programme, Wyn Owen, an organisational development consultant focusing on training for farmers and rural businesses, motivated the group in an engaging session discussing issues often identified as challenges for young people in farming businesses, such as leadership, delegation and negotiation. Business planning and benchmarking were also covered by AHDB and Andrew Robinson from Armstrong Watson accountants.

NSA Communications Manager Katie James joined the group and comments: "It has been a pleasure to spend time with this year's group of inspirational young sheep farmers. The final session was a good opportunity to reflect on their own development since joining the programme at the start of 2022.



This year's NSA Next Generation Ambassadors.

"This is just the start of the group's journey with NSA, with everyone looking forward to the Ambassadors becoming familiar faces in their respective NSA regions and national NSA committees."

The Ambassadors will share their outcomes from the year in the next edition of *Sheep Farmer* magazine.

Winter workshops

NSA Next Generation is looking forward to once again welcoming young sheep farmers to its popular winter conferences this November.

Having held successful events last year in Stirling, Scotland and Shrewsbury, Shropshire, the workshops this year will continue to move around the UK, taking place at livestock markets in the north of England and another in South Wales.

Providing the young farming audience with an opportunity to come together with like-minded sheep farming enthusiasts, the winter conferences give attendees the chance to join relevant and interesting workshops covering a range of sheep farming topics focused on supporting the next generation of UK sheep farmers.

The events are suitable for anyone already working in the sector or students with a specific interest in sheep farming and will be a great opportunity to learn more about the NSA Next Generation programme. The days are free to attend with a delicious, hot meal thrown in too.

Dates, venues and booking details at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.



Workshop activities range from knowledge transfer to hands on practical sessions.

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Texel ram lambs are brought on and sold as shearlings.

Variety of roles helps South East producer achieve his goals

By Katie James, NSA

An open-minded approach and willingness to embrace all opportunities has seen NSA South East Region Ram Sale Chair James Goffin successfully move his own and other enterprises forward.

James runs his own pedigree Texel flock, works full time on a local beef and sheep enterprise and manages to fit in part time work as a Suitably Qualified Person (SQP). He comments: "I am always busy. It's a constant juggling act – but you keep spinning the plates and hope you don't drop one." During the summer months James adds to this busy life further by shearing around 2,000 sheep.

James was not born into farming but found himself drawn to the sector by his love of the

outdoors. James now works full time at Hooper's Farm, Sevenoaks, on the Kent/Surrey border. It's a relatively new position for James, joining a year ago to assist farm owners Rod and Polly Dumbreck with their flock of 90 Dorset Down and Dorset cross ewes, herd of 20 pedigree Sussex cattle and to help with barn conversions for holiday lets. James runs his own Puissance Texel flock alongside this.

Pedigree Texels

Having previously run a commercial flock of approximately 200 ewes, James downsized to focus on the development of his Texels in 2015. "At the time lamb price had dipped, we were losing grazing and spending more time and money on the sheep with little reward. We looked at our system and decided to move into the pedigree world rather than churning out finished lambs for little or no profit," says James.

This was a decision he hasn't regretted. "A pedigree ewe still costs the same to keep as a commercial ewe. Of course, the purchase price is slightly higher but the comparable cost of keeping a lamb on to a breeding shearling isn't much greater – but the end value is," he adds.

James aims to produce quality breeding stock from his 35 pedigree ewes, keeping only the best replacement females and selling a number of rams each year, all vet checked and fertility tested before sale ensuring no substandard stock is sold. "Even if a tup looks the part this proves he can play the part," he comments.

Despite the small numbers, James will run four tupping groups to give genetic variation. A teaser is being used for the first time this year.



James Goffin with his 'working pet', a Clydesdale called Edward.

James comments: "We have used sponges in the past with mixed success and prices are increasing for this method. Lambing a small number of ewes over an extended period is tedious so we need them tightened up."

Lambing takes place indoors in a polytunnel from the end of February and James' management of the flock is meticulous. He explains: "I take every step I can to ensure optimal health for ewes and lambs. After lambing, each ewe gets warm water and glucose – a tip I picked up from years of milking. All ewes' teats are wiped before lambs are guided to latch. We also use a Brix refractometer to test colostrum quality."

Medicine use

Recent withdrawal of oral antibiotics is not an issue for the flock. James continues: "Watery mouth has never been a problem for us but the wipes help to give us further assurance. Gloves are always used and, if lambing ropes are needed, they are disinfected immediately. Pens are cleaned out between lambs and lime used." Energy blocks and, more unusually, Himalayan rock salt, are also offered as James believes this encourages ewes to drink, supporting good colostrum quality and milk supply.

From birth, stock is recorded using management software and a linked app. He says: "I have always weighed lambs regularly from birth for my own records but now we complete further records including backfat scanning and log it with the recording system."

Lambs are offered creep once placed in mothering up pens and this will be fed until weaning. Although pleased with their performance, James is determined when it comes to growth rates. He says: "I find the Texel growth exceptional but I don't like to set target rates to aim for. If you set yourself a target then what happens when you hit it? Do you relax, content with your achievement? I would rather keep aiming for better and just see what my stock can do."

Parasites

James' experience as a SQP means he appreciates the value of tools available to him to keep on top of parasites. He comments: "We faecal egg count, use the SCOPS nematodirus forecast and monitor the weather, in addition to monitoring liver fluke populations in wild rabbits on the farm before deciding on treatment options. Although sometimes haemonchus can catch us out."

He also takes a strict approach to culling. "Some have said I'm too critical of my own sheep but I think you need to be in order to breed better. I cull hard to avoid my flock being held back," he comments.

James has ambitions to grow his business and recently purchased a pedigree Charollais ram lamb with a view to starting a new flock. He's also interested in breeding crossbreds in the future.

"One problem with pedigrees is the seasonality of the income. But I'm wary that to grow numbers we will have to start chasing grazing again and spend more on increasingly expensive fuel and electric fencing equipment," he adds.

Currently James must consider his availability of time while working at Hooper's Farm, a varied



A Cheviot teaser is being trialled for the first time this year.

"I am always busy. It's a constant juggling act – but you keep spinning the plates and hope you don't drop one."
James Goffin

role in a system in complete contrast to that of his own flock. "We are completely different but we have a common goal of producing quality stock from grass and I enjoy the variety," James explains.

The 100acre (40ha) farm, as a member of Pasture for Life, is entirely grass based, fitting well with the enterprise's move to regenerative farming methods. The native Dorset sheep have been passed on from owner Rod's mother as the farm moved away from Mules to a breed that could perform well on farm with no additional feed.

Dorsets

James says: "Dorsets were new to me but I'm impressed. They look after themselves and their lambs just from forage, lambing and milking well. As a breed they definitely have their place in the UK system and the flavour of the meat from grass is exceptional." This flavour is a key marketing tool for the farm's produce, all of which is sold direct from the farm through farmers' markets and farm gate sales.

Working in rotation with the farm's cattle, the sheep are moved between paddocks frequently. "The frequent moving gives the grass time to

recover and dung is in a more concentrated area," explains James.

The farm seems well placed to fit with future environmental support schemes, already being involved with higher level stewardship, but this may not be straightforward. James states: "With all of the farm being non-improved pasture it is not eligible for certain new schemes, therefore we need to look at other future support options."

Farm facts

- New NSA South East Region Ram Sale Chair successfully led the region's inaugural sale this year.
- Time split between 35-ewe pedigree Texel flock and employment on grass-based sheep and beef enterprise.
- Lambs not fit for breeding from his Texel flock are sold in box schemes.
- Focus on production of quality breeding stock and grass finished lamb in both systems.
- Full time work is complemented by a part time SQP role and summer shearing round.



In contrast to James' Texel flock, he also enjoys working with native Dorset ewes.



James has enjoyed success showing his stock at local shows.



Educating the next generation helps challenge and change risk-taking behaviors from the off.

A safer farming future for all

By Stephanie Berkeley, Yellow Wellies



The poor safety record of agriculture is well known. Our industry accounts for 18% of all workplace fatal injuries despite only employing 1% of Great Britain's working population.

As a result, the Yellow Wellies charity was established in 2014 to preserve and protect the physical and mental wellbeing of the next generation of farmers and farm workers. As part of the Farm Safety Foundation, the aim is to drive a real cultural change in attitudes and behaviors to risk-taking and poor mental health.

Sadly, too often, the stigma around mental health prevents those who need help from seeking it, but there has never been a time when this has been more relevant. According to research, 94% of farmers under 40 believe mental health is the biggest hidden danger facing the industry today. Combine this with 90% agreeing mental health and farm safety are linked and you can see the scale of the challenge being faced.

Engagement and training

Yellow Wellies promotes farm safety and wellbeing among those making their journey into the industry by working closely with the YFC network across the UK to challenge and change these risk-taking behaviours. Specifically with YFC in England and Wales, Yellow Wellies engages and trains all 36,000 members, supports national and county shows, and communicates online via e-newsletters and social media, as well as getting face-to-face at events and competitions throughout the year.

Two award-winning campaigns funded by Yellow Wellies are Mind Your Head and Farm Safety Week. These two weeks engage more than 200 partners showing a united front in calling for those in the industry to look after their physical as well as their mental wellbeing each and every day, not just during these awareness weeks.

The Yellow Wellies education programme, now in its eighth year, continues to deliver engaging farm safety training to more than 12,000 agricultural students throughout the UK. This is only a snapshot of what Yellow Wellies does. Remember it's your health, your safety so it's your choice.

More at www.yellowwellies.org.

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Opportunities created from trusted, expert advice

By Katie James, NSA



Having his eyes opened to previously unseen opportunities, Euan Sanderson from Biggar, Lanarkshire, is already realising the benefit of working with an experienced and impartial adviser.

Since being chosen as one of three winners of the NSA Next Generation and Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) mentoring competition earlier this year, Euan was matched with livestock adviser Rhidian Jones of RJ Livestock Services. His application highlighted a desire to make improvements to the breeding enterprise of 550 homebred Texel cross ewes and 330 Scotch/Cheviot Mules that runs alongside beef and arable interests on the family farm.

Improvements

Euan explains: "We run a traditional system but it's let down by bought-in sheep underperforming. We'd like to improve on this and also consider how best to lamb, graze and winter the flock."

Following these objectives, Rhidian, who has more than 30 years of experience in the sector, met with Euan and highlighted some areas to build on.

Rhidian says: "With bought in stock not performing well and significant replacement costs, it makes sense to move the system to a closed flock. We spoke about breeds that could help the farm achieve this and also how to improve the performance of homebred stock further."

Ewe breeds with a slightly reduced mature size were identified as a good potential way to save on maintenance requirements, while also opening the potential to grow the size of the flock, another long term aim of Euan's.

Rhidian also discussed with Euan and his father why lamb growth rates should be a priority for the farm. "It is important to get lambs away earlier, meaning less lambs left that may have more issues and need extra, potentially more costly, nutrition to finish," he says.



Euan now appreciates the value an adviser can add.

Tips were passed onto Euan on weaning and strategies to ensure lambs receive the most efficient nutrition. Rhidian continues: "Of course, lamb vigour and then initial and subsequent growth starts with genetics but, after that, the quality and availability of grass from the age of six weeks (the age they begin to derive more nutrition from grass than milk) is key.

"Issues such as the frequency ewes and lambs are moved and sward height will be crucial so the most nutritious grass can be accessed and contact with worm eggs limited."

As for wintering of sheep, Rhidian recommended Euan follow the principle of only giving ewes access to the grass they need. He says: "If given free access, grass can quickly run out - a combination of the ewes eating more than they need and trampling/wasting it. Silage would need to be fed earlier and there would be no grass in spring as any regrowth is eaten as soon as it emerges. By allocating the ewes what they need, you can exploit the grass for longer." This may mean moving ewes as frequently as daily.

Utilising grass

Rhidian continues: "This is the best way to make the grass last longer. It may seem like a lot of work but, in reality, the work is only spent once every seven to 10 days setting up the paddocks for that period. Moving a group will only take a few minutes each time."

Euan has been pleased by the advice received through the mentoring. He says: "The hours I spent with Rhidian were very useful. He has extensive knowledge of sheep farming so it was great to get another set of eyes to look round.

"We had a look at many aspects including the breeding programme, how you would go about closing the flock, vitamin and mineral levels, but also deferred grazing and how to cheapen winter keep for the sheep. Deferred grazing is something we had never thought of before.

"Overall, it was a great experience. Letting someone else look at your farm and give advice with more knowledge than ourselves is important, as they may see opportunities we can't see ourselves."

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Euan plans to utilise grass better by only giving ewes and lambs access to what they need.

DNA forensics used to identify sheep worrying culprits

After years of campaigning for tighter legislation on sheep worrying and positive outcomes for farmers, NSA is delighted to see North Wales Police helping to provide invaluable support to future livestock attack investigations.

NSA works tirelessly to increase education on responsible dog ownership and the consequences of dogs being allowed to wander or off lead around sheep, while offering farmers support with worrying incidents.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "Sheep worrying continues to be a big challenge for producers across the UK. Research aiming to increase accurate prosecution of dangerous dogs can only be seen as positive."

North Wales Rural Crime Team (RCT) officers are gathering swab samples from injured and deceased livestock crime scenes, which researchers are using to calibrate current methods of isolating the DNA of the canine involved. This provides the ability to implement a DNA-based investigation process to identify dogs suspected of attacks.

It is hoped the results will enable police forces and forensics to employ best DNA practice when dealing with livestock attacks under the new powers proposed in the Kept Animals Bill in England and Wales. Officers will then have the power to collect DNA samples from both livestock and dogs suspected of committing an attack.

Expanded legislation

The new law will also provide increased seizure powers for officers, strengthen the court's position to disqualify dog owners from keeping other dogs and expand the number of livestock species and grazing areas covered within the legislation.

Dave Allen, RCT Officer and the National Police Chiefs' Council Secretary for Livestock Offences, hopes his team's work will yield positive results, enabling other forces to adopt these processes in the future.

He said: "We find most livestock worrying cases reported to us are committed by dogs that have escaped, and many involve sheep attacks."

As NSA has been highlighting, and PC Allen agrees, current legislation passed in 1953 is outdated and reflects poorly on both modern farming and police techniques. "This is an exciting project and I hope the new DNA powers and forensic techniques being researched will allow for a direct comparison with a crime scene and a suspected dog," he continues.

To drive things forward, officers have benefitted from practical sessions on sampling methods and advice on the optimal sites from which to obtain canine DNA from an attacked animal.

PC Allen says: "Current swabs collected from attacked livestock are not admissible as evidence in court as there is no law in place. This collaboration aims to hone techniques to sample and isolate canine DNA, which ultimately improves the chances of tracing the owners responsible.

"This could provide the platform for science and police guidance to be in



Escaped dogs are one of the biggest causes of sheep attacks.

place when the new Act becomes law and allows police forces to adopt this new approach. We also hope these techniques can be replicated on other animal-based crimes, such as identifying dogs involved in badger baiting and poaching offences."

NSA applauds this pre-emptive work to maximise the new Kept Animals Bill when it becomes law. Mr Stocker concludes: "North Wales Police has frequently provided examples of best practice approaches to sheep worrying and this is another great step forward. It's incredibly positive to see rural police officers increasing their skillsets, collaborating with science and working towards a greater outcome for all."

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Officers attempt 'taping' DNA sampling techniques.

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All change for residential lettings in Wales, with England to follow

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

A new regime in Wales for rented homes is very different and requires prompt action by farmers who have rented out farm cottages and other properties – whether its to their workers or other occupants.

The new Rented Homes (Wales) Act 2016 comes into force on 1st December 2022, when all existing residential lettings and licences will be converted to 'occupation contracts'. Landlords have six months from this date to issue a written statement to existing tenants/licensees (called 'occupation contract-holders') setting out the terms of their occupation contracts.

Changes

For new lettings, the written statement must be issued within two weeks of the contract-holders taking up occupation. This includes farm workers taken on under a contract of employment.

Other changes under the new regime include:

- New requirements for alarms and electrical safety testing, and for landlords to keep the structure and exterior of the property in repair and keep service installations in good repair and proper working order.
- 'No fault' eviction will need a minimum of six months' notice and may not be issued until six months after the occupation contract starts.
- Assured agricultural occupancies will be converted into occupation contracts, with succession, survivorship and inheritance provisions applying.

Lettings where no rent or other consideration is payable are not caught by the changes.

In England

Meanwhile, in England, changes to residential tenancies are also afoot, but no legislation has yet been passed.

'No fault' evictions are likely to be scrapped and the overall regime will provide additional protections for tenants, although probably not to the extent of the Welsh regime.

In the meantime, we are still seeing examples of farm employers failing to serve a 'form 9' landlord's notice before handing over the keys of a cottage to new farm workers.

Please take care to avoid this situation. Farmer-landlords think they are granting an assured shorthold tenancy (AST) and will be able to recover possession should they need to, with limited trouble. Instead, they are probably, and inadvertently, granting an assured agricultural occupancy that enjoys significantly greater protection than an AST.

NSA members in the UK are eligible for 30 minutes of free legal advice from Roythornes. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-community/membership-benefits.



Changes to residential letting legislation may mean you are no longer compliant.

Relevant recent cases

Useful distinction around notices to quit. A court ruled earlier this year that one sibling in a farm partnership could not serve a notice to quit a tenancy against the wishes of the other two siblings, as they were breaching their duty as a trustee to act in the interests of the partnership. However, a separate case involving an Agricultural Holdings Act joint tenancy, ruled that two brothers were only trustees because of their co-ownership of the tenancy and there was no duty owed to prevent one of them terminating the tenancy.

Trust registration. HMRC has widened the categories of trusts that must register online with the Trust Registration Service, potentially affecting all UK farm partnerships holding land and assets in trust. There is a threat of penalties for trustees who missed the 1st September 2022 deadline. Roythornes has clarified with HMRC which partnership trusts are affected and recommends trustees seek advice.

Renewable battery storage. In a recent planning appeal an inspector permitted a proposed 50MW battery storage site in the Staffordshire green belt, because the environmental benefits were deemed sufficient to outweigh harm to the green belt.

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ArcZero helps guide NI farmers on pathway towards net zero farming

By Jason Rankin, Agrisearch **AgriSearch**
Driving Excellence & Innovation

ArcZero is empowering Northern Ireland farmers to make quality management decisions, change their practices to better mitigate emissions and increase carbon stocks while improving on-farm efficiency.

The 'accelerating farming towards carbon neutrality' project is working with farmers to benchmark their journey on reducing carbon emissions by footprinting greenhouse gas emissions, measuring on farm carbon stocks and highlighting potential for carbon sequestration on farm.

Roger and Hilary Bell are one of seven farms involved in the ArcZero Project. They run 500 lowland and upland ewes on 78ha (180 acres), operating a rotational and strip grazing system. It is also a CAFRE demonstration farm, involved in the GrassCheck NI project to aid grassland utilisation, and has multi-species swards for a beef and sheep project.

Carbon benchmarking

As part of ArcZero, the Bells carbon benchmarked their farm using AgreCalc, a carbon benchmarking tool to establish emissions from routine farming operations. From this it was possible to establish the Bells' farm produces 21.99kg/CO₂e/kgDW, which is significantly lower than the benchmark average of 30.70kg/CO₂e/kgDW from other sheep farms on the AgreCalc database.

To measure soil and above ground carbon stocks, soil sampling and specialist technology was used, showing that 13,800t of carbon was stored in the top 30cm of soil, while 188t of carbon was stored in trees and hedgerows. This

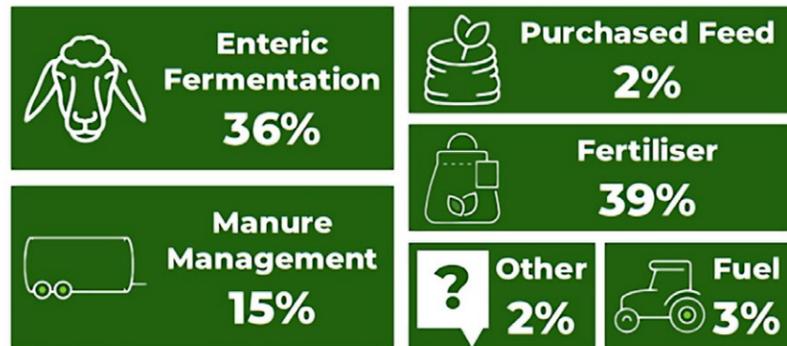


Farm: 21.99
kg/CO₂e/kg DW



Average 30.70
kg/CO₂e/kg DW

Sources of Emissions by %



AgreCalc carbon emissions statistics for the Bell's farm.

indicates more than 14,000t of carbon is stored on farm, or 51,500t/CO₂e.

While performance on the Bell farm is extremely good, the Bells are not resting on their laurels and are continuing to make improvements to mitigate carbon emissions. The main focus is to improve soil pH, aiming for pH 6.0-6.5 or above on a number of fields, which will aid the establishment of multi-species swards.

Mitigation

Further mitigation options available include nutrient use efficiency through applying slurry using LESS methods, using slurry amendments and additives, as well as putting in place a soil nutrient management plan, which will soon become part of the new soil nutrient management scheme in Northern Ireland.

Increasing use of genomics and genetic selection within the flock will be another way to build upon beneficial traits and improve efficiency, as well as introducing feed additives that could help to reduce enteric fermentation emissions.

Hedgerow management to allow hedges to grow out and increased planting could also help sequester carbon, helping to mitigate the carbon emissions from farming operations.

While the Bells have already introduced multi-species swards into their grazing rotation, there is the possibility to increase the land area, which will further reduce fertiliser application, saving money, reducing nitrous oxide emissions, and improving soil structure while building soil carbon.

ArcZero is a farmer-led project funded by DAERA and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. More at www.arczeroni.org/publications.



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1. Clements et al (2014). *Veterinary Record* 10.1136/vr.102161
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Underused forage crops are the future – if knowledge gaps are filled



Currently underused crops could be the solution to finding future forage systems that provide increased outputs from less inputs, a lower environmental impact and more ecosystem services.



Grazing chicory can increase livestock productivity and resilience of forage supply.

That is the conclusion of the Defra-funded ForaGIN scoping project, which carried out a preliminary assessment of 53 currently underused forage crops to consider their potential for increased livestock productivity, resilience of forage supply, impacts on enteric methane and wider environment impacts and benefits.

A range of challenges to forage production were identified and prioritised, with changing weather patterns identified as the main concern. Also considered were nitrogen use efficiency, weed control in legumes and mixed swards, matching crops/varieties to the soil type and climate, establishment of some legumes, and establishing legumes/herbs within existing grassland swards.

The resulting shortlist is ribwort plantain, sainfoin, lucerne, annual clovers, chicory, birdsfoot trefoil, festulolium grasses, red clover, other perennial clovers, vetch (tares), forage lupins and fodder beet, as well as multi-species swards shown to have the highest potential to improve livestock productivity.

Ellie Sweetman from NIAB led the project. She says: "The shortlist does not provide a full or final list of the forages that should be grown in the UK but creates a focus for research and development activity over the next five to 10 years.

"Stakeholder discussions were extensive and included soil structure and organic matter, trace

elements, fertiliser use, livestock performance and health, environmental impacts, and how intensive or low-input future agricultural systems may be."

Outcomes

A major outcome of the project was the identification of key gaps in knowledge (see panel) and the need for technical input to allow farmers to select the best system, crops and varieties for their specific farm circumstances.

Ms Sweetman says: "The barriers and knowledge gaps identified for the shortlisted forages are largely associated with the lack of readily available information on the practical integration of these forages within farming systems – best practice for both growing the crops (seedbed preparation, establishment etc.) and livestock utilisation (meeting animal needs while accommodating annual variation in species composition of mixed swards).

"Knowledge exchange activity is also needed to support uptake across the industry and, together, these two elements are most likely to increase the rate of uptake of underused forages.

"The forage industry could collaborate to share

technical, agronomic and utilisation information on the practical integration of these underused forages within farming systems.

"Effective demonstration of currently underused forage crops, to highlight best agronomic and utilisation practise, should be delivered in partnership through existing industry networks and farming organisations."

Key knowledge gaps

- Agronomic requirements, machinery, labour and infrastructure requirements.
- Regionality of growing conditions and use.
- Resilience to changing climate.
- Nutritional profile for livestock.
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With grazing forage supplies drastically reduced this summer, ewes might not be fit for tugging.

Impact of dry summer on body condition – when is a ewe too thin to tup?

By Phillipa Page & Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

This season, more than ever, it is crucial to look at the flock and plan for the likely impacts of this year's dry weather.

With ewe body condition at tugging a crucial factor, consider what changes can be realistically made now to reduce the ongoing impact.

The productive cycle for sheep starts with the mating period, which is the key time to determine the next year of productivity, profitability and success. Ewe body condition is a significant issue this year in the parts of the UK where the prolonged dry weather has drastically reduced grazing forage supplies.

Many farmers have needed to feed conserved forage to maintain ewes in the correct condition. Some have needed to supplement with hard feed, grains or licks to prevent further loss in condition. In some cases, farmers have either de-stocked and reduced their flock size by culling severely post-weaning, or sold lambs early as stores.

Conserved forage

All these actions have implications for the business, but to maintain a viable sheep enterprise it is necessary to minimise the impact of tugging ewes that are too thin. Feeding ewes sufficient concentrated feed and forage over a six to eight week period to raise a single body condition score (BCS) pre-tugging costs approximately £17-20/ewe based upon a feed price of £380/t and additional conserved forage costs.

Ewes mated at the optimum time of the breeding season in the target BCS and on good nutrition should produce the optimum number of lambs for the breed and age of the ewe.

It also avoids further implications of lean ewes post tugging and during pregnancy, such as:

- Reduced birth weights (also a problem if lean ewes are flushed to increase lamb numbers).

- Reduced volume and quality of colostrum, leading to increased neonatal disease.
- Reduced milk supply, which will affect lamb growth rates and increase mastitis risk.
- Increased risk of metabolic disease at lambing, such as twin lamb disease.
- Increase required feeding for ewes at lambing time.
- Reduced fertility at the next mating period if the ewes are in low body condition at peak lactation (when the ovaries are primed for the next mating).

Target BCS at tugging is 3-3.5 for lowland breeds and 2-2.5 for hill breeds. Feel the ewes in the lumber region of their back, behind the ribs and assess as accurately as possible which ewes are at target and which ewes need to be fed.

Scoring

When you can easily push your fingers under the short ribs, you know the ewe is less than condition score three. Even if you don't want to put numbers to it, do make sure you have divided out the thin girls - as unnecessary feeding ewes that are at target or above will be costly.

If some ewes are still too lean to tup, despite further feeding, this should prompt further investigation.

Firstly, rule out lameness, mastitis and poor teeth. For the latter, check incisors and feel/look at the back molar teeth for lumps, loss or pain.

For ewe lambs and shearlings where the challenge has been high and immunity still developing, also discuss with your vet and undertake faecal egg counting to rule out a heavy worm burden.

If these causes have been excluded, there may be other reasons (see panel) for thin ewes which need to be resolved.

Best advice can be summed up as 'don't waste a cull ewe' and it would be an expensive strategy

to avoid investigating poor ewe condition that can't be explained by feeding levels. Discuss with your vet or adviser and work out a plan of how to investigate, manage and control these diseases. The sooner these issues are addressed, the lower the impact they will have long term in the flock.



BCS can be used to assess tugging viability.

Tugging ewe lambs

Mating ewe lambs should be based upon their weight as a percentage of the adult average body weight. This is farm specific, and you should know the average adult ewe bodyweight of your flock.

Ewe lambs should be mated at 65% of mature bodyweight and shearlings/yearlings mated at 85%.

The effect of the dry weather may mean you cannot breed as many ewe lambs as usual, if they have not achieved their targets at tugging. Thoroughly assess their group and be prepared to alter your plans. If they are too small, tugging will reduce their longevity.

Potential causes of thin ewes

- **Haemonchus** (barbers pole worm) is a blood sucker and causes bottle jaw, weight loss, anaemia and ill thrift - but not scour. A faecal egg count on ewes will usually be extremely high (2,000–5,000epg). It also affects lambs.
- **Chronic fluke infection** can show signs similar to haemonchus. Although the dry summer will mean a lower risk in many areas this winter, there is always regional variation and ewes can have adult fluke in their bile duct from 10 weeks after their access to wetter snail ground. Discuss with your vet about when it is appropriate to submit a muck sample for diagnosis.
- **Johne's disease** is caused by a contagious mycobacteria that causes the internal surface of the gut to thicken, causing poor absorption of nutrients and protein loss. Clinical signs are weight loss and bottle jaw in later stages. Diagnosis usually involves a faecal test and it is possible to pool samples to limit costs.
- **Maedi visna** is a production-limiting disease caused by a contagious virus leading to weight loss, respiratory signs and reduced milk production. Occasionally it is first recognised due to the observation of a single older ewe consistently dragging her hind leg (neurological signs). We would advise you undertake an annual screen of 12 thin cull ewes to monitor for this disease to ensure it is picked up promptly.



- **Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma** is a production limiting disease due to lung tumours caused by a contagious virus. The signs are weight loss, respiratory disease and clear nasal discharge in the later stages. Diagnosis is challenging but it is most effective to ensure regular post mortem examinations of ewes found dead.

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Clinical signs of scab aren't always present, meaning sub-clinical sheep can inadvertently spread the problem.

New detection methods – are we finally winning the war on scab?

By Stewart Burgess, Moredun, and Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS **FOR FLOCK'S SAKE**

Sheep scab is endemic in the UK, but current estimates of 8,000-10,000 cases per annum are inaccurate.

New detection methods have highlighted numbers of infested flocks are actually much higher than previously believed, explaining why scab is so difficult to control.

Since spring last year, the For Flock's Sake project has been working with clusters of farmers and local coordinators (NSA being one), to control sheep scab in three hotspot areas across England. Using the new Elisa blood test developed by Moredun, clusters have been testing and treating in a co-ordinated way, to aid scab control, with game changing results.

Prior to the Elisa blood test, sheep scab could only be confirmed using a skin scraping. While that represents irrefutable evidence, it has two major drawbacks. Firstly, it can be difficult to get a good sample and many cases go unconfirmed. Secondly, it can only be done when some sheep are showing clinical signs, which may be many weeks or even months after infestation.

The blood test can detect scab just two weeks after infestation, allowing identification and treatment of affected animals before scab mites get a hold and spread further. Of course, it can be a bit of a shock to flock owners that they are positive without any obvious signs of disease (sub-clinical infection), but that is where the project has helped to change pre-conceptions and encourage cooperation among contiguous groups of flocks.

Farmer response

The response of farmers within the project far exceeded initial expectations, hitting the maximum involvement of 300 farmers very quickly. The majority have engaged enthusiastically and worked together to use the blood test results to help them coordinate treatments for scab.

The other key elements of the project have been the coordinators and the local vets. They have worked tirelessly with the clusters of farmers to

provide support and encouragement, as well as coordinating meetings and treatment plans. The importance of this sort of group cooperation is one of the most vital lessons to emerge from the last 18 months.

Unexpectedly, in a handful of the 300 flocks, the project found cases of scab mites that are resistant to the 3-ML (macrocytic lactone) injectables, confirmed by Moredun. However, it is important to remember such resistance is still quite rare and many cases of apparent treatment failure are more likely the result of missing one or more sheep in a mob, poor treatment technique or using an inaccurate dose rate.

In addition, other skin infections such as lice can appear similar to scab but require different treatments. Therefore, it is crucial to talk to your vet or adviser to get an accurate diagnosis before jumping to conclusions or re-treating.

Treatment

Interestingly, by using some of the resistant mites from the project, Moredun has been able to conclusively show that although these mites cannot be killed with an endectocide, they can be killed by effective exposure to an organophosphate (OP) plunge dip. Showers or jettors do not effectively kill scab mites, because

they do not get down to the skin where the mites reside, like plunge dips do. Therefore, to protect the current situation where there is no resistance to OPs, it is vital not to use showers and jettors and select for resistance.

There is a shift back to using OP plunge dipping. Traditionally scab was controlled by dipping, but the product's use has changed dramatically over the last 30 years. Since 1992, it moved from a near 100% use of OP (and some now-outlawed synthetic pyrethroid) dips, to a situation at the end of the last decade when OP dip accounted for only 10% of ectoparasite treatments in sheep.

The remaining 90% was split, 40% endectocide and 50% pour-ons for blowfly/lice treatments. However, many in the industry will have noticed there has been an increasing demand for OP sheep dip over the last year and there are a number of reasons fuelling this.

Scab mites can survive off-host in shed fleece.



Reports of resistance to ML injectables in early 2018 have undoubtedly made some farmers turn back to dipping. There is also the realisation from more farmers that the overuse of these injectables is accelerating the development of resistance to the 3-ML (clear) group wormers used to control gastrointestinal parasites. Finally, the For Flock's Sake project is actively encouraging coordinated cluster treatment with OP dipping to get on top of scab.

Future prospects

What are the next steps? In England, there are plans to expand hotspots and then add new areas where there is interest, working on the 'cluster' principle with groups working together, possibly with a vet or adviser helping to coordinate efforts. There are plans afoot in Wales and Scotland for sheep scab control projects and Northern Ireland has recently started its own programme.

The lessons learned from the For Flock's Sake project are already helping to improve the way sheep scab blood tests are used and interpreted, providing a better chance of getting ahead of sheep scab and allowing effective, targeted treatments, prolonging their efficacy for the future.

More at www.scops.org.uk/external-parasites/scab and www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/sheep-scab.



Scab facts

- Endemic in the UK, scab causes significant production and welfare problems estimated to cost the sheep industry more than £78-200m annually.
- Sheep scab is caused by infestation of the skin surface with the scab mite, *Psoroptes ovis*.
- Scab is characterised by yellow scabs on the skin surface, accompanied by restlessness, scratching, loss of wool, bleeding wounds and loss of condition.
- Scab mites can survive off-host for 16-19 days so sources of infestation include anything the infested sheep has contacted, such as fence posts, handling facilities, shearing equipment and trailers.
- Scab is common throughout the year, but the majority of outbreaks occur between September and March.
- There are only two types of treatment available for sheep scab. An OP plunge dip or an injectable from the 3-ML (clear) group.



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Harnessing ewe efficiency data to drive business sustainability



By using ewe efficiency data to guide breeding decisions, a Farming Connect demonstration farm has found top performing females are able to rear twice as many kilograms of lamb than the average.



Ewe efficiency data can help evaluate flock performance and influence system changes.

Llion and Siân Jones at Moelogan Fawr, Conwy, are performance recording to identify the most efficient females for breeding replacements for their flock of improved Welsh and crossbred ewes.

It's their mission to have a closed flock of hardy ewes, bred to perform on grass with an average mature weight of 60-75kg, producing lambs that will finish with no inputs at 16-22kg deadweight.

To achieve this, numbers of lambs born and reared, lamb weights, health issues such as lameness and mastitis, and body condition score (BCS) are recorded electronically. In addition, ewes are weighed at tupping, scanning, housing, when lambs are eight weeks old and again at weaning.

Independent sheep consultant Kate Phillips is providing technical input to the project. For flocks breeding their own replacements, she says it is

right to identify them at birth from good maternal lines – but warns that while selecting ewe lambs with higher growth rates up to eight weeks of age will generally result in higher milk yield, it can also lead to heavier mature ewes.

Data

Lambing statistics from 2022 show the maximum kg of lamb reared per ewe was 62kg compared to the average at 31.6kg. Combining these figures with kg ewe mated has shown a range in ewe efficiency of 20%-107%, with the average for the Welsh ewes at 56%.

Mrs Phillips says a big range of efficiency within a flock is expected but adds: "It is eye opening to see the actual data, to know that some ewes are passengers and others are working really hard."

Twin-bearing ewes are the most efficient, but Mrs Phillips cautions that, for hill breeds, rearing a big proportion of twins as replacements might take the flock in a direction that is too extreme. "It is often better to have a ewe producing one decent sized lamb," she says, specifically for hill flocks.

Regular monitoring of ewe BCS at key times has also helped guide ewe management, revealing some ewes lost two BCS points between mating and weaning.

"Selecting robust females who can rear lambs without losing too much condition is important," says Mrs Phillips, explaining the better a ewe's BCS at tupping, the higher her lambing percentage at scanning and lamb weight at eight weeks and at weaning. The aim at Moelogan is to keep hill ewes at a level BCS 2.5-3, avoiding peaks and troughs in condition. EID is also being used to flag other health and performance issues.

Mrs Phillips supports this approach for maternal ability, saying lameness, mastitis and prolapse are red flags and selecting from ewes with little or no incidence of health issues will reduce disease incidence across the flock.

"Although breeding efficiency into a ewe flock can be slow, the benefits are cumulative, and will result in a more productive flock in the long-term," she says.



The Jones' have streamlined performance recording to guide breeding decisions.

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Controlling risk factors for toxoplasma parasite infection in your flock

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun 

Infectious abortion is one of the major flock health problems faced by sheep farmers, caused by a range of bacteria, viruses and protozoa, all leading to significant financial impact on production.

In the UK the most important are *Chlamydia abortus* and *Toxoplasma gondii*, but other pathogens include the campylobacter and salmonella bacteria species, Schmallenberg and border disease viruses, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Coxiella burnetii* (Q-fever).

Toxoplasma parasites are tiny, single-celled organisms and are among the most successful parasites worldwide. Toxoplasma can infect all warm-blooded animals, including humans. The cat family are definitive hosts of the parasite, meaning the parasite can only complete its life cycle in a member of the cat family.

Definitive host

Cats become infected for the first time when they start hunting and eat infected wild rodents and birds. Following a primary infection, cats can shed millions of tough-shelled oocysts (parasite eggs) into the environment, where they can survive and remain infective for several years, preferring temperate, moist conditions.

Following infection, most cats develop immunity to the parasite and tend not to re-shed oocysts. As young cats are the main shedders of the parasite, it is good practice to have resident, neutered and healthy farm cats.

Sheep become infected with toxoplasma through the ingestion of infective oocysts on pasture or in contaminated feed or water. A primary infection during pregnancy may cause disease and abortion of the foetus. Sheep develop immunity following a primary infection that will protect against disease in a subsequent pregnancy.

If they become infected without pregnancy, they show very few clinical signs but may have a transient fever. Research at Moredun has shown as few as 200 infectious oocysts may cause toxoplasma abortion in a susceptible ewe.

There is a live vaccine available, licenced for the UK for use at least three weeks prior to tupping.*

In unvaccinated animals that get infected, the parasite persists in the animal within tissue cysts. Consumption of undercooked meat from infected animals is a common route of transmission to people. Particular risk groups include pregnant women and immune-compromised individuals.

Contamination of water with the oocyst stage of the parasite is also a possible route of infection for humans and may be more prominent than previously thought.

Moredun has demonstrated the presence of toxoplasma DNA in water from catchments across Scotland. Therefore, it may be assumed oocysts are present in these water sources, although further investigation is needed.

Early diagnosis

As with all disease situations, early and accurate diagnosis of the problem is key to minimising losses and applying effective prevention and control strategies.



Image: Professor David Ferguson.

Diagnostics

- Dead lambs and their placentas (if available) should be submitted to the veterinary investigation laboratory, where tissue samples will be examined.
- Molecular diagnostic tests can detect toxoplasma-specific DNA from infected tissue samples.
- Labs can examine blood samples for the presence of antibodies, which indicate exposure to the parasite.

Always isolate the aborting ewe immediately, clean up the aborted material and bedding and get a veterinary diagnosis as soon as possible. This is critical when diagnosis shows an infectious agent is responsible that could then spread among the flock. For this reason, it is advisable not to use ewes that have had late abortions, mummified lambs or suspiciously weak lambs as foster mothers until diagnostic tests have confirmed this is due to toxoplasmosis and not enzootic abortion, which is transmissible to lambs.

Moredun's aim is to advance understanding of how sheep can be protected against toxoplasmosis and subsequently use this knowledge to develop next generation vaccines that are safer, offer better protection and cost less.

Scientists are also in the process of developing new molecular diagnostics to identify toxoplasma strains in livestock, wildlife, humans and the environment and understand transmission routes. Moredun is investigating new systems to study the virulence of toxoplasma parasites and help develop new prevention and control strategies.

**MSD has announced a Toxovax supply outage until mid-October. Please discuss alternative options with your vet, as resupply is not expected for the remainder of the year.*

Ensuring all tups and ewes are in optimal health condition pre-tupping can reduce the risks of a poor lambing.



Focus on the breeding season to maximise lambing outcomes

By Laura Eden, Bishopton Veterinary Group



The demand on tups at this time of year means farmers cannot afford for one of their team to be underperforming.

Recently it has been shown that one in five breeding tups on farm are sub-fertile, failing a physical examination and/or semen analysis. By undertaking a breeding soundness examination at least six weeks before use, any abnormalities or queries with the males can be identified and hopefully rectified in that time. It also allows a window of opportunity for new tups to be purchased if necessary.

The fertility and condition of tups will alter year on year, so it is advised that reproductive performance is considered from the previous season and a soundness examination conducted on all breeding males - but especially those that are new to the flock, unproven sires and any that have suffered health problems.

Condition

In addition to the tup, the breeding flock needs to be in optimal condition ahead of tupping time to be the most productive it can be. Performance will correlate with condition and can be likened to an athlete preparing for a competition. Every breeding female should receive a pre-tupping MOT consisting of recording BCS, checking feet, teeth, the udder and performance history.

New females entering the flock should be vaccinated against the two most common causes of abortion, enzootic abortion (*Chlamydia abortus*) and toxoplasmosis if required. Utilising

these vaccines effectively within a flock provides protection against two factors of potential lamb loss.

There are many other infectious, inflammatory or nutritional factors that will affect the productivity of breeding sheep, which are more challenging to address in comparison with these two vaccines.

Fertility

The nature of a ewe's ability to cycle well, how quickly she becomes pregnant, how she carries the pregnancy and how she births and rears her offspring next year, ultimately are all determined by her condition pre-tupping.

Some farmers may want to consider synchronising the flock. There are different ways of synchronising oestrus in ewes, all of which have the same obvious advantages.

A synchronised flock means a shorter period exposed to the tups and, therefore, a tighter lambing season that can be aimed towards a time of high demand in lambs. This results in more even batches of lambs for easier management during the grazing season and reduced labour at lambing time, increasing the efficiency of both the flock and staff.

Continued overleaf.

Exposure to toxoplasmosis can be via infected grazing, feed and/or water.



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Synchronisation also allows flocks to split batches or lamb earlier. However, the challenges that come with synchronisation include increasing the tup to ewe ratio, so the tups are not overwhelmed and overworked. It is recommended no more than one tup to 10 ewes when their oestrus has been synchronised.

A thick and fast lambing time also requires the capacity to manage an influx of lambing sheep, making sure there is enough shed and pen space available if lambing inside and being able to maintain good hygiene.

Teaser

The non-hormonal option is to use a teaser tup - an entire male that has been vasectomised, a minor surgery that leaves him still with his testosterone fuelled testicles but is unable to get ewes pregnant. The teaser is put in with the ewes a fortnight before the fertile tups in order to 'warm-up' the ewes. His presence encourages the ewe's reproductive cycle so, when the fertile tups are mixed with the ewes, they are already cycling well.

Some flocks use a hormonal device containing progesterone. A hormonal device is inserted into the ewe's vagina for a period of 12-14 days, depending on which product is used, resulting in synchronised ovulation and a compact lambing time.

Following on from synchronisation, if it is not feasible to provide the number of tups required at the 1:10 ratio, another option would be artificial insemination (AI) of ewes using either fresh or frozen semen by keyhole surgery. This mitigates the issue of needing increased tup numbers, as you can utilise fewer, higher quality tups and introduce new genetics into a flock, while



Vasectomised 'teaser' rams are a non-hormonal way of tightening your lambing period.

minimising the spread of disease and maintaining good biosecurity.

AI is an option for smaller flocks or rare breed flocks where access to males is limited and owning a tup may not be practical, but also has an important role in a commercial setting.

Tup selection

Selecting tups with more efficient EBVs, targeting growth and carcass conformation, results in lambs finishing quicker, spending less time on farm and, therefore, reducing the carbon emissions associated with production.

Another measure of efficiency is kilograms of lamb weaned per ewe, which can be a useful key

performance indicator. Ideally, a breeding female will wean 100% of her bodyweight to make her an efficient member of the flock.

Environmental considerations and consumer expectations are a significant and real challenge facing food producers. As farming heads towards a period of change with reduction in subsidies, shepherds need to be homing in on improving flock efficiency and the breeding season provides a huge opportunity to do so.

Monitoring input costs to focus on flock health planning and preventative actions will help target those areas that are less efficient and contribute to improving both productivity and profitability.

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Following the flock

We visit Somerset, Herefordshire and Powys to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Olly Matthews

NSA South West Region Chair, Somerset



Ewes are looking on the lean side, but we have six weeks until the rams go in and grass ahead of them now after an exceptionally dry summer.

For the first time ever, we've had to feed hay to dry ewes for six weeks post weaning on sacrifice paddocks. A summer crop of forage rape and turnips has turned out to be a great insurance policy, with 14 acres (6ha) keeping 400 weaned lambs for eight weeks. It also looks like we will get a second graze on the forage rape later in the season.

Back in July we tested lambs for mineral deficiencies and identified a lack of cobalt and selenium in growing lambs. In response to this we bolused and orally drenched all lambs still on the farm, which has made a huge difference to lamb health and growth post weaning. Ewes will be bolused pre-tupping and we hope to see the same positive impact on ewe health and performance.

Mineral deficiencies have now been rectified on Olly's farm.



Richard Vines

NSA Marches Region Chair, Herefordshire

Here in Herefordshire the sheep have coped well with tighter grass supply due to the limited rainfall. It's only the lambs who have required more assistance and management.

But every year seems to bring new challenges. This year we've been trailing different mineral drenches, having moved away from bolus application a few years ago. New herbal leys have performed well but even they went very thin in July. Recent rainfall has been a great help and has rejuvenated the pastures. We've been busy making hay and silage both for ourselves and others, and fortunately we seem to have good quality and sufficient quantity for winter.

I'm starting to get to grips with our involvement in the future farming schemes pilot. Water buffer zones have provided a haven for the wildlife, but with little precipitation, the benefits of using our grassland subsoiler have been minimal. Different levels of sward management have been almost impossible in grazing leys with stock needing everything available. But taking the decision to not tidy up and top some fields has paid dividends and, although a little unsightly, new growth has avoided too much scorch in the hot, dry summer.

All things considered the sheep industry has fared reasonably well to date, but with winter fast approaching, forage quality and availability, coupled with rising feed costs will bring further challenges.



Richard has been busy selling rams this summer.



Ewes from Kate's flock are in good condition ahead of tupping

Kate Hovers

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair, Powys



Looking back at my contribution for January this year I wrote about the mud and wet fields... how things change!

We live on a wet farm so have been blessed with grass this year while further east it is brown and dusty. It was great to return to the Royal Welsh show. Our sheep coped well despite the hot conditions, as the sheep sheds were some of the coolest places on the showground. Pleasingly my three-year-old Hill Radnor ram was breed champion.

Two months on and our ewes have been bolused, as previous blood and forage samples show we are low in cobalt and marginal in selenium and they are now looking in tupping condition with weeks to spare. We sponged a small batch of ewes a few weeks ago, some older crossbreds to sell as couples and five ewes from three of our breeds for possible show lambs. I shall be glad to put my Torwen Badger Face tup out with his ewes as he is already pacing the fence looking for a suitable place to jump. I find hill rams become very eager as tupping approaches.

April-born lambs were drenched with an orange (4-AD) wormer recently and just need to put some finish on to start selling. It could be a tricky year selling store lambs as the usual buyers are short of grazing. We try to finish as many as possible, but the upland grazing quality isn't good enough as we go into late autumn and winter.



A kraal is used to protect the flock from predators and theft.

Challenges overcome to succeed on South African sheep farm

By Katie James, NSA

Having experienced sheep farming in different corners of the globe, including the UK, Australia and the Falkland Islands, Janine Leimer put her travels behind her when she settled in South Africa in the early 1990s.

not raining at all for the other six months, which has its challenges."

Janine makes her own hay but buys in maize and concentrates to supplement winter feed. "I also grow oats and stubble turnips mixed with vetch and clover, which I irrigate to supply some green feed, especially over the lambing period," she continues.

Location

She established a flock of 60 pedigree Hampshire Downs in a nation that presents challenges of complete contrast to UK farms. Janine has been an NSA member for almost 40 years and has valued the advice it has given her on the other side of the world.

Janine's farm sits north of Johannesburg on the Highveld Plateau, resulting in a mix of hot, wet summers followed by dry winters.

Janine explains: "Being 26 degrees south of the equator, it would be very hot if we were not at such altitude. We are in a high summer rainfall area with approximately 705mm per year (nearly 28 inches). It tends to rain from October to April, but it can vary year on year. We can count on it

Sitting at 6,000m (19,700ft), the Highveld is well known for its commercial farming enterprises, but Janine's small flock is typical of those closer to urban centres due to availability of land and lack of grazing at certain times during the year. Her aim is to produce rams for cross breeding over local sheep, ultimately producing finished lambs. "Demand is high and many people ask for ewes as well, but a major problem I and other Hampshire breeders in South Africa have is a small gene pool. We are not allowed to import from the UK or Europe because of scrapie, but are trying to convince our government scrapie genotyping means this is not a problem," says Janine.

The flock is brought into a kraal (livestock enclosure) at night to prevent predation from jackal, lynx and domestic dogs, and a llama runs with them for extra protection, but a two-legged predator is considered the main threat.

"Sheep can be profitable in South Africa so the biggest problem we face is keeping hold of them and selling them before they are stolen. This sounds dramatic, but is a real thing," says Janine, describing the two-meter, high voltage, alarmed electric fence around her 42-acre (17ha) farm.

Flock protection must also come in the form of additional vaccines to those used in the UK, for bluetongue, botulism, and Rift Valley fever.

Janine reports the South African market for sheep meat is very buoyant and prices are high.



Hampshire breeder Janine Leimer.

Most lamb is finished in feedlots and then sent to butchers and supermarkets. Demand spikes during the Eid festival, as there is a large population of Muslims in the country.

Demand

Janine comments: "Demand outstrips supply during Eid and good prices can be achieved. The only downside is the festival does not always fall at the ideal time of the year for lamb production, meaning lambs need to be kept for several months longer than normal. If this is over the grass growing season the impact is minimal. If you have to hold them over the dry winter months, the implication of hard feeding outstrips the advantageous prices."

Janine sees a positive outlook for South African sheep farmers. She concludes: "South Africa has a great outlook for future lamb production. The number of middle-class households is growing and the demand for meat is expanding. More households can have a better diet and, pleasingly, lamb is one of the nation's favourite meats despite its relatively high price."



Hampshire sheep are versatile to the South African climate.



TICK OFF YOUR TUPPING CHECKLIST!



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REPLACEMENT & MANAGEMENT TAGS

Get in touch with our team to order any management, or replacement tags. Management tags can be a great way of organising your flock before & after tupping!

