

SHEEP FARMER

DECEMBER 2022 / JANUARY 2023
VOL. 42 NO. 6 ISSN 0141-2434

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION
NSA CHIEF EXECUTIVE WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

SURVIVING THE WINTER
KEEPING EWES HEALTHY DURING PREGNACY

GLOBAL UPDATE
FIVE-PAGE INTERNATIONAL FOCUS


Season's greetings

TO ALL OUR MEMBERS



your business your future

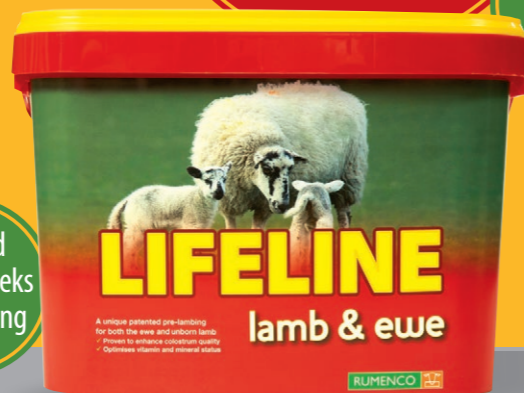
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Speaking up for sheep: now and in the future



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

I hope everyone reading this views the National Sheep Association as 'their organisation', an organisation fighting hard to protect and enhance the business interests and way of life of sheep farming whatever its size and scale.

Without any doubt it's well worth fighting for.

In these highly uncertain times there is something reassuring about the fundamental nature and practicality that is inherently connected to livestock, land and the environment, and I believe we have made progress over time in raising awareness of our contribution to Britain's economy and culture.

In recent years we've enjoyed good values for our stock, particularly good quality sheep, and we are now seeing significant numbers of sheep making their way back into mixed farming approaches, boosting farm productivity and adding more life and diversity alongside other enterprises.

Reliance

While we aren't immune from rising costs, we have an approach to farming that at least reduces reliance on costly inflationary inputs, such as feed, fertiliser and fuel. We have gained recognition in many quarters for the environmental and social goods that come from sheep farming, the benefits of grassland soils in storing carbon and providing for nature, the culture and rural communities that provide benefit for local economies and, of course, the fact we produce some of the most nutritious and delicious food, and fibre, from grassland growing mainly from sunshine, rain and soil nutrients. In these times of interest in renewables, sheep farming at it's best isn't far from being the ultimate in renewable technology.

Convincing the public and policymakers of these facts is a major part of NSA's work. It's relentless and likely to never be completed. Defending our industry when it comes under criticism, and to evidence and prepare ourselves

to deliver outcomes valued by society is crucial to the success of our future.

In many ways NSA acts as the bridge between the sheep farming world and everyone else, be they policymakers, researchers, related industries or the wider public, and this is a job we do well because of our strong grassroots connections.

But all this work, and the unprecedented volume of current policy and trade activity, creates a need to for us to work harder for you. This, coupled with inflationary pressures, means our membership subscriptions will increase from January 2023 (see page 2 for details).

I hope I reflect the view of all our members in saying there are few membership organisations that provide such a good service for your business, true passion throughout the team and have such a positive impact for our industry, at such low cost.

Wellbeing

Finally with Christmas around the corner, and the New Year not far behind, it's worth remembering this is a time of peace and friendship.

We should spare a thought for those in Ukraine and other parts of the world caught up in conflict and difficulty. Closer to home, let's also remember there will be many people facing hardship through these challenging times, including many sheep and livestock farmers who will be experiencing a difficult winter with high costs and a stark realisation that BPS continues to decline while there is still scant detail of future farming support and reward for the delivery of public goods.

Looking out for colleagues who may be suffering with anxiety or depression is something the farming community generally does well, but this winter we may need to do more and I urge any members who feel a need to talk to pick up the phone to people they know and trust. If that means contacting any of us at NSA Head Office or in our regions, please don't hesitate. If we are unable to help fully we will be able to suggest someone who can, in full confidence.

To all our readers, have a Happy Christmas and a prosperous and interesting 2023.



National Sheep Association

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www.nationalsheep.org.uk
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Welcoming new staff members

A combination of replacing staff retirements and filling new positions saw NSA Head Office welcome three new team members in November.

This positive progress sees Fiona Parker join as NSA Support & Activities Officer, Lyndsey Price as Membership Officer and Kim Massey as Association Manager. Details of new and existing staff can be found on the NSA website.

NSA extends a huge thanks to Gill Callow, who has been an invaluable part of the team, working on membership administration for many years. We wish her a happy retirement. [See page 4 and 5 for two new regional appointments.](#)



Lyndsey, Kim and Fiona join the NSA Head Office team.

NSA regions looking forward to ARMMs

Eight of the nine NSA regions have their annual members' meetings in early 2023.

All meetings are open to members and non-members, although only members can vote. Each meeting will be followed by additional speakers from the sector.

- **Marches.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Marches Region will be held on Tuesday 17th January, 7pm at the Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH.
- **Scotland.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Scottish Region will be held on Thursday 19th January, 1.30pm at the Glensaugh Research Station, Fettercairn, Laurencekirk, AB30 1HB.
- **Northern.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Region will be held on Thursday 2nd February, 7.30pm at Penrith Auction Mart, Agricultural Hall, Skirsgill Lane, Penrith, CA11 0DN.
- **South East.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA South East Region will be held on Tuesday 7th February, 6.30pm at the Angel Hotel, Privett, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3NN.
- **Northern Ireland.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Ireland Region will be held on Tuesday 7th February, 7.30pm at the Dunsilly Hotel, 20 Dunsilly Road, Antrim, BT41 2JH.
- **Central.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Central Region will be held on Thursday 23rd February, 7.30pm at the Agricultural Business Centre, Agricultural Way, Bakewell, DE45 1AH.
- **Cymru/Wales.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be held on Thursday 16th February, 11.30am in the International Pavilion, Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3WY.
- **South West.** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA South West Region will be held on Tuesday 21st February, 7.30pm at the Stockman's Restaurant, Exeter Livestock Centre, Matford Business Park, Exeter, EX2 8FD.
[Full details and proxy vote information at \[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events\]\(http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events\).](#)

Sheep Breeders Round Table assisted by NSA

NSA joined industry representatives, farmers, researchers and more at the Sheep Breeders Round Table (SBRT) in Nottinghamshire in mid-November, and was delighted to help organise the first face-to-face event since 2019.

The conference allowed NSA and others to share the latest updates and research from the world of sheep genetics. NSA Next Generation and several NSA regions were pleased to provide sponsored and part-sponsored place for six young sheep farmers to attend the three-day event. [Details and presentations at \[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT\]\(http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT\).](#)



Te Pari sheep handling system worth £20,000 still available.

Last chance to win

It's not long now until the lucky winner will be announced of the NSA and Te Pari prize giveaway. Visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw before Saturday 31st December 2022.

Renewal notifications

NSA apologises if postal strikes prevent renewal notifications reaching members who pay by direct debit in a timely fashion. Notifications usually arrive 28 days prior to your renewal payment, which is 11th January 2023 for January payers.



Amazon smile donations can be gifted to NSA.

Shop to support NSA

If you are Christmas shopping on Amazon this year, consider adding NSA as your Amazon Smile charity. This means the Amazon Smile Foundation will donate 0.5% of your spend to NSA. To do this, search for 'National Sheep Association' in the charity search function (not 'NSA').

Find lambing help

A reminder the NSA Lambing List, sponsored by Pharmacy, the online veterinary medicines supplier, is now open and ready for members to add placement details. Go to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or contact NSA Head Office.

Subscription increase

As explained on page 1, the NSA membership fee will increase from 1st January 2023. Individual will be £70, joint £80, under 27 £25 and international £80. Contact NSA Head Office to discuss a discount for a group package.

A sheep farming voice

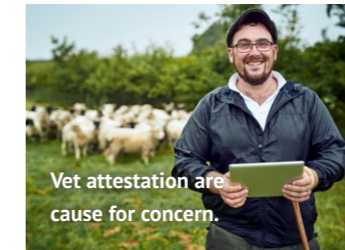
Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

NSA welcomes export sign-off extension

During November, proposals by Defra risked a significant amount of the UK's meat production becoming non-compliant for export to the EU.

Defra was looking to move from a farmer self declaration of a vet visit and freedom of disease for animals destined for export, to a vet attestation from December this year.

With farmers, the supply chain and vets unable to deliver this at such short notice, NSA and other industry bodies worked tirelessly to ensure the proposals did not become reality. Agreement that official veterinarians in abattoirs can continue to sign export health certificates alongside farmer self-declarations for another year means the exporting cliff edge has been avoided, for now.



Vet attestation are cause for concern.

Smokie decision delayed further

NSA and other industry bodies shared a proposal with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to change domestic legislation to allow the production of skin-on sheep meat (smokies) in the UK back in 2020.

At that time, FSA indicated it was unable to progress the proposal immediately as the UK was still in the Brexit transition period. Nearly three years on and the situation is disappointingly similar.

The latest statement says: "The working group's proposal is being considered in line with the Common Framework for Food and Feed Safety and Hygiene, to determine if sufficient evidence is included to trigger the risk analysis process. FSA will respond once a decision is made."

NSA speaks up for sheep during COP27

With world leaders meeting in Egypt at COP27 in November, the role of ruminants in the climate change fight was once again cast into the spotlight.

NSA was very vocal around the summit and continues to highlight how sheep are part of the solution. Nature and biodiversity were high on the COP27 agenda, with NSA promoting herbal leys and mixed species as an essential way to ensure a diverse range of habitats for nature recovery – with the added benefit of producing food alongside. [More on page 8.](#)



NSA says grassland is an underrated habitat.

AHDB's operational intentions welcomed

It's been confirmed AHDB will invest levy money in three areas to support the reputation of beef and lamb – exports (market access, trade shows, international marketing), marketing (We Eat Balanced, education) and insight and evidence (market intelligence, animal health and welfare, environment, genetics).

NSA welcomed the November announcement as 'confident, necessary and brave', saying it aligned with the views of NSA and levy payers. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "We cannot expect AHDB to focus more in certain areas, with reduced financial resources, without stepping back in others. AHDB recognises it does not have a role in telling farmers how to farm, but instead to enable farmers to make decisions that are right for them."



A Defra review has cast doubt on detail of future farming schemes.

Ambiguity in England's future farming schemes

Following widespread rumours that the Environment Land Management Scheme (ELMS) would be scrapped in England, due to Ministerial changes and budgetary restraints, Defra has stated there will be tweaks at the edges rather than a full-scale review.

NSA has been vocal in saying this leaves the farming industry in uncertainty, even though Farming Minister Mark Spencer has confirmed the government is still aiming to roll out ELMS by 2024 and that the basic payment system will end as planned.

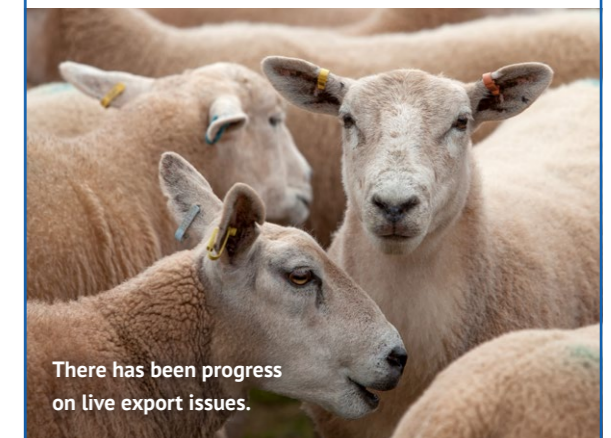
NSA is acutely aware of the challenges facing the agriculture industry and the mounting pressures felt by many – and is available to talk to members who want more information or guidance. [Call NSA Head Office or email \[policy@nationalsheep.org.uk\]\(mailto:policy@nationalsheep.org.uk\).](mailto:call_nsa_head_office@nationalsheep.org.uk)

Live animals moved to EU

Despite ongoing setbacks, NSA remains hopeful for a live animal border control post (BCP) at Calais.

But in the absence of this facility, a significant number of breeding stock from farms in Great Britain and Northern Ireland did manage to enter the EU in late November.

The shipment went from Cairnryan in Scotland to Larne in Northern Ireland, which acted as a BCP into the EU, then onto Rosslare in Southern Ireland, across to Cherbourg in Northern France, then its final destination in Hungary. NSA recognises such a long journey with multiple loading and unloading is not ideal, at great cost and effort by the exporters, but at least proves it can be done. That such lengths were gone to also underlines the demand for quality UK sheep genetics on the continent.



There has been progress on live export issues.

NSA Regions



Central

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Northern Ireland

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suem@nationalsheep.org.uk

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 Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

Regional members welcomed Bryn Hughes of Wynnstay to an evening meeting in late November.

After the dry summer, Bryn provided invaluable advice on options for winter feeding, with a particular focus on pregnant ewe body condition focus.

We now look forward to our Annual Regional Members' Meeting, taking place at NSA Head Office, Malvern, Worcestershire, in February. We hope as many members as possible will be able to join us - and also encourage people to come forward to join the committee on an ongoing basis and help influence NSA activity in the region. Contact me to find out more.



Standing room only at NSA Marches Region's recent meeting.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

Thank you to all those who attended the inaugural NSA Scotland Lamb for St Andrews Day Dinner in late November.

It was a fantastic evening and it certainly provided an opportunity for the sheep industry to socialise, network and ultimately celebrate a very worthy cause - lamb! Thanks goes to QMS for providing the lamb and to those who sponsored prizes for the raffle.

We look forward to seeing members and others interested in the sheep industry again at our Annual Regional Members' Meeting in January, followed by many exciting events in 2023.



NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

Our November committee meeting was held at Penrith Mart, Cumbria, to discuss regional business and 2023 planning.

Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting (ARMM) will also be held at Penrith Mart on Thursday 2nd February with a full agenda of speakers to be released soon.

Beth Halp, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador from Northern Region who we sponsored to attend the Sheep Breeders Round Table in November will report back at the ARMM.

I spoke at the November meeting of the South Pennines Farmers Group about NSA, joined by previous regional chairman Thomas Carrick to demonstrate how NSA has helped shape his decisions on-farm, encouraging them to be more involved within policy and the industry.

NSA North Sheep planning is well underway for Wednesday 7th June at Bradford House Farm.

More at www.northsheep.org.uk.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

We are looking forward to welcoming Stuart Ashworth as a guest speaker for our Annual Region Members' Meeting in February.

Stuart is an independent advisor who has worked for more than 40 years as an agricultural economist for the European Commission, devolved administrations and organisations in the red meat supply chain. He spent 10 years leading the economic analysis team at QMS and is working with the Northern Ireland sheep sector on an industry strategy. We hope members will be able to join us.



Stuart Ashworth.



NSA congratulates Lionel Organ (centre) on winning the John Gittins Memorial Award.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

We were pleased to return to the Welsh Winter Fair at Builth Wells at the end of November.

We enjoyed two lively days welcoming members old and new to the stand, including HCC representatives to discuss proposed levy increases.

Congratulations to Lionel Organ on winning the John Gittins Memorial Award at the Winter Fair, a fitting recognition of his work breeding and promoting Charollais and Lleyn sheep and sharing his wealth of advice and experience.

Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting will be on Thursday 16th February on the Royal Welsh Showground, with speakers to be announced in the new year.

A reminder that stand bookings are open for NSA Welsh Sheep at www.welshsheep.org.uk

NSA South East Region

By Yann Le Du, Chair

Our final event of the year brought 50 attendees to neighbouring West Berkshire farms in October, to hear from Steve Waters and Jeremy Plank about their contrasting systems.

Steve lambs 600 Lleyn ewes indoors, together with a herd of suckler cows and arable cropping in a fully integrated mixed organic farming system. Jeremy farms conventionally, lambing 1,400 North Country Mules outdoors in May, also with a suckler herd, some dairy beef and arable cropping.

Their vet, JP Crilly of Larkmead Vets, joined for a discussion of the health challenges faced on both farms. And Nick Down, farm manager of Yattendon Estates, joined to give an insight into the estate's progress.

Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting will be held on Tuesday 7th February at the Angel, Privett, Alton, with formal business, an evening presentation and a shepherd's pie supper.



NSA South East Region attracted a good crowd for its autumn farm walk.

NSA Eastern Region

The NSA Eastern Region Annual Members' Meeting in November saw the formal NSA business conducted and then speaker Simon Wearmouth of Brown & Co discuss future farming support.

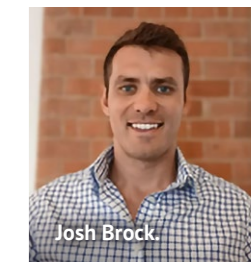
Katie James, NSA Communications Manager, provided an update on NSA Head Office news and activity.

The meeting marked the retirement of Regional Manager Jonathan Barber, who stepped down after 30 years. The region expressed its thanks to Jonathan and his wife Carroll, presenting them with a painting of a Norfolk sheep farming scene.

The region welcomes Josh Brock as the new Regional Manager, joining with several years' experience working within the sheep sector as a shepherd and Adas consultant.



NSA Eastern Region thanked Jonathan and Carrol Barber.



Josh Brock.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

At the beginning of December, NSA South West Region met for an enlightening meeting with representatives from Defra to hear more about the direction of ELMS and future farm support.

With so much uncertainty around many aspects of our business, it is critical we get clarity and consistency where possible.

As we move into the new year, we will be holding our Annual Regions Members' Meeting on Tuesday 21st February at Exeter Market. Please keep an eye on the NSA Weekly Email Update for details of speakers. We look forward to seeing many of you there on the night.

NSA Central Region

By James Bickerton, Chair

As a region, we welcome Lizzy Wells as our new Regional Manager, selected from several very strong candidates we interviewed for the role.

Thanks goes to Alice Helliwell, Lizzy's predecessor, for all her hard work in helping NSA Central Region transition from the covid years back to some kind of normality.

We look forward to 2023 activity kickstarting with a tour of British Wool's Head Office, grading depot and Haworth scouring plant in January. The Annual Regional Members' Meeting in February will be a good evening, with three field days offering practical sheep farming advice planned for later in 2023.

See page 2 for times and locations of all Annual Regional Members' Meetings. See page 6 and 7 for more from the three devolved nationals on agricultural policy work.

Welsh future farming schemes still under discussion post consultation feedback

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Development of the Sustainable Farming Scheme is well under way after feedback closed in November.

NSA worked closely with the Welsh Government, NSA Cymru/Wales Region and the Welsh Commons Forum to ensure its response accurately reflected the views of Welsh farmers. Welsh Government has continued to host several co-design groups to feed into the final scheme outline, due to be published for consultation in 2023.

NVZs

NSA is working collaboratively with industry to ensure the best outcome for Welsh farmers following the announcement of the whole Wales NVZ being upheld. NSA has written to Welsh Ministers and will be hosting a technical webinar in early January to provide more information.



A review of sheep dip disposal costs is underway in Wales.

HCC is seeking industry views on the proposal to link levy rates to inflation using a tracker. Discussions are underway and a consultation is live, closing on Friday 16th December.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will feed into this.

Dipping

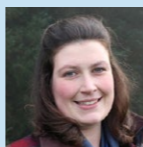
Natural Resources Wales is planning to review and overhaul its charges, including those for the spreading to land of waste sheep dip and disposal of wash-water produced from cleaning and disinfecting after an outbreak of animal disease. If you choose to plunge dip sheep and dispose of it via a permit to land as opposed to disposing of it at a licensed facility, the charges proposed can be found online.

NSA Cymru/Wales is producing a robust response to the proposed increases, recognising

dipping sheep is an important tool for controlling sheep scab. It is also investigating more environmentally friendly methods of dip disposal.

Equipping the next generation to provide food security with environmental gains

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



I spoke in the last edition of this magazine about the opportunity for Scottish agriculture to build future-proofed businesses while improving relationships with the public, nature and environment.

Since then the Scottish Agriculture Bill consultation has been released. NSA Scottish Region has been engaging with other stakeholders and Scottish Government to ensure the bill, when it is implemented, equips farmers and crofters with the support necessary to survive and flourish in the future. Despite numerous calls for the main responsibilities of government to include food security, food supply and food safety there has been little proof of the detail to suggest how or when this will be achieved.

Grassland values

One of the truly unique properties of the Scottish landscape is the ability to grow grass. We boast the natural propensity for livestock to champion via the environment and vice versa. Significant support must be given to Scottish sheep farmers and crofters not only to maintain critical mass but ensure all desirable outcomes can fundamentally be achieved via livestock.

The unintended consequences of decisions made today will have long lasting effects, not only on our finite resources but also an ever-growing population. Our next generation must be equipped to ensure there is a future sheep industry.

Even with rising input costs, young people are still able to enter the profession - but understandably it is getting harder. Our established sheep

producers are being asked to provide more and more services all the time and to diversify. We are only human. When does it all become too much to handle?

Future prospects

We have a fantastic resource of vibrant and engaged members who have an abundance of talent and have shown adaptability to take on future challenges with enthusiasm, being committed to tackling critical issues for the sheep industry and as part of the wider agricultural collective. NSA continues to highlight these concerns to Scottish Government and will continue to best represent the industry throughout the consultation process.

The direction of global actions presents an uncertain future, but we still need to eat and farmers and crofters are essential to this.



NSA Scottish Region is calling for food security, supply and safety in its response to the current consultation.



Medicine access risk for NI farmers

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Since leaving the EU, the supply of veterinary medicines to NI has continued unaffected thus far, facilitated by the grace period which is due to expire on 31st December.

The EU's proposed import requirements covering licensing and warehousing administration of products arriving in NI will not be achievable by 1st January 2023.

It's estimated more than 50% of all veterinary medicines will be affected, including anaesthetics, pain relief products and a wide range of vaccinations, extending to pet and horse owners too. This raises huge concerns for animal welfare, food security, animal health and human health, as many of the products tackle zoonotic diseases. Despite strong concern from both agricultural and veterinary industry about this, no long-term solutions have been agreed.

Sheep scab

Working towards tackling sheep scab, a pilot scheme launched in September has already seen a number of interested farmers sign up. Working with the Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland (AHWNI), farms experiencing problems with scab can benefit from a dedicated veterinary consultation on farm, from their own veterinary practice, with the cost of the initial diagnosis visit covered by the project. There is also has a limited pot of money to assist with treatment.

The project is a unique opportunity to make headway on controlling this burdensome and difficult condition. Having seen the success so far, NSA encourages more farmers to sign-up and take advantage of the support. Any interested farmers should contact Jennifer Martin at AHWNI

Policy direction

In other news, NSA, along with the Ulster Farming Union, Livestock & Meat Commission for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association, has developed a task force to inform and advise DAERA and discuss the Future Agriculture plans and proposals published in March 2022.

It is likely DAERA will enable a system to assist farms with completing farm carbon audits, measuring both individual farm output and sectorial carbon output. NSA is awaiting further detail on exact proposals and how data will be used.

Contact Jennifer Martin on jenny.marting@animalhealthni.com or 07517 994497.

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Is improved grassland management the key to more climate-friendly farming?

NSA was particularly active in calling out misinformation about ruminant livestock at the time of November's COP27 summit – and, given the high profile of nature and biodiversity at the event, highlighting where sheep are part of the climate change solution.

NSA strongly believes grassland is an important wildlife habitat and, therefore, essential to the nature recovery jigsaw – at the same time as supporting productive sheep farming.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, explains: "In relation to livestock production, the UK meat industry is competing on a global stage to ensure its product is at the forefront of consumers' minds. To achieve this, the industry needs support and investment from UK governments to realise the climate and nature benefits of livestock farming, recognition of their importance in feeding the nation and contributing to economic growth, but also in tackling the climate and nature crisis."

Promoting grassland

Following COP27, NSA argues the environmental benefits of grassland and mixed swards need to be better understood. Perennial ryegrass leys have long been the go-to for many UK livestock enterprises, but agriculture is responding to the need for positive climate actions by investigating ryegrass alternatives to buffer against climate extremes, reduce reliance on fertiliser and other inputs, and provide environmental gains.

Carbon sequestration is on many farmers' minds and the potential for grassland to be a significant carbon store is often overlooked in favour of trees.

NSA highlights that research undertaken in recent years has shown how important the interaction between soil, roots and plant is. In

addition to acting as key water catchments, limiting soil and nutrient run off, and a good foundation for nature, grasslands act as giant carbon sinks, capturing greenhouse gases (GHG) and sequestering carbon in the soil. Some estimates suggest grasslands have 15-30% of the world's carbon tied up in their soil.

The deep rooting nature of mixed swards and herbal leys translates to improved soil structure and increased carbon storage. Research suggests 85-90% of the nutrients required by plants for healthy growth is acquired via carbon exchange.

Grazing benefits

Mr Stocker continues: "Grazing is the most effective, natural and productive way to maintain grasslands, often contributing up to 35% of soil organic matter through manure, providing vital nutrients to crops and supporting invertebrates and soil organisms that keep the soil healthy."

When considering methane (CH₄) emissions, mixed swards and herbal leys are also intrinsically linked to the carbon cycle. Methane emitted by ruminants is a potent GHG, some 76 times stronger than carbon dioxide (CO₂), but unlike CO₂ that accumulates in the atmosphere, CH₄ breaks down relatively quickly in a 12-15-year cycle.

In grass-based systems CH₄ is recycled into carbon via plants and soil functions. This is known as the biogenic carbon cycle and is an important natural cycle that's been happening since the beginning of life on earth.

Livestock grazing of grasslands helps remove GHG from the air by stimulating more plant growth, which accelerates absorption of CO₂, turning it into carbon in plants and soil. It is only when fossil fuel-based inputs are used this natural cycle is disrupted and carbon emissions become out of balance.

"NSA has continued to ask for better reporting methods when it comes to carbon footprints and

greenhouse gas emissions and is keen to see a whole farm sustainability approach to cutting emissions," says Mr Stocker, highlighting the messages NSA has shared repeatedly.

"Farmers across the country are committed to lowering their carbon footprint. Many have been implementing actions over the past few years, including improving efficiency via nutrition, health and grazing approaches, creating of hedges and woodland, water management, renewable energy production and habitat creation."

NSA will continue to work closely with all parties to ensure livestock production, sheep farming and grassland receive the recognition it deserves.

Long term benefits of diverse swards

Many of the environmental benefits realised by herbal leys and mixed swards have an equal benefit for soils and farmland. They improve soil structure, soil life and nutrient availability, provide resilience in dry periods with many species having drought and even flood resistance qualities, and improve conditions for other species.

But they can be expensive to establish and need careful management if species are to be maintained, needing rest periods and suitable rotational grazing.

Potential positives:

- Herbal leys containing at least 30% legumes can eliminate the need for artificial nitrogen fertiliser.
- Forage legumes with a high protein content can reduce reliance on imported feeds.
- High value legume and herb species can support lamb growth rates of up to 250g/day, in contrast to 80-150g/day on perennial ryegrass and white clover.
- Multispecies swards can produce equivalent dry matter yields to ryegrass with low nitrogen input.
- Multi species swards can improve rumen function, provide a greater range of trace elements and minerals, and some have anthelmintic properties.

Environmental benefits of grassland and mixed swards need to be understood.



Making the most of orphan lambs

With lambing fast approaching, you need to have a nutritional plan in place to manage any lambs born that need rearing away from the ewe. Feeding a high quality milk replacer such as Milkivit Energized Lamb Milk can help ensure these lambs make a valuable contribution to flock margins.

Milkivit Energized Lamb Milk (ELM) is a unique lamb milk replacer formulated to be closer to ewe's milk, that helps lambs to achieve their full growth potential and therefore maximises your profitability.



Will Pearson who farms in Northamptonshire uses Milkivit ELM to make the most of lambs from his 800 North Country Mules.

The ewes lamb in March, typically scanning at 220%. Ewes are turned out with two lambs. Ewes with singles will adopt a triplet with any surplus triplets hand-reared along with any mis-mothered lambs and lambs from ewes with poor milk yields. On average he will artificially rear 90-100 lambs a year.

Will decided to feed them on ELM as he wanted to improve the return he was getting from his lambs. The precise formulation optimises protein digestibility, energy density and vitamin & mineral supplementation, whilst reducing osmolality. What this meant for Will is that he achieved excellent lamb performance whilst simultaneously reducing the risk of pre weaning nutritional challenges such as scour and bloat.

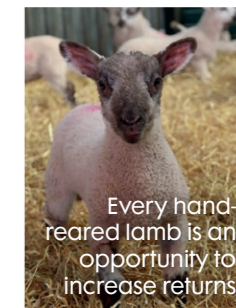
The artificially reared lambs are fed on Milkivit ELM through a machine system with roughage and creep available from 10 days old. Milkivit ELM is only mixed

at a rate of 175g/litre of water and fed adlib. This reduced mixing concentration means that the cost per litre of mixed milk was reduced, compared to his previous milk replacer. This ensured a cost-effective milk feeding period for cade lambs. Improved palatability meant consistent intakes varying from 0.7-1.2 litres per day depending on the lamb age and size. Lambs are on milk for 35 days before being abruptly weaned, meaning an average intake of Milkivit ELM is 13-14kg/lamb.

"We are looking to sell lambs at 40kg," Will comments. "Overall, the lambs on Milkivit ELM looked good and grew well. Artificially reared lambs this year averaged a kill out weight of 16.96kg which at £6.30/kg gave an average value of £106/lamb.

"Health was good too thanks to the reduced osmolality. From 123 lambs reared this year, we had just one death while we would normally budget 5-6% mortality.

"Milkivit ELM mixed really well, and the results suggest the lambs found it easy to digest, meaning the energy was absorbed for growth and immunity."



Every hand-reared lamb is an opportunity to increase returns



90-100 lambs are hand-reared every year

Milkivit Energized Lamb Milk

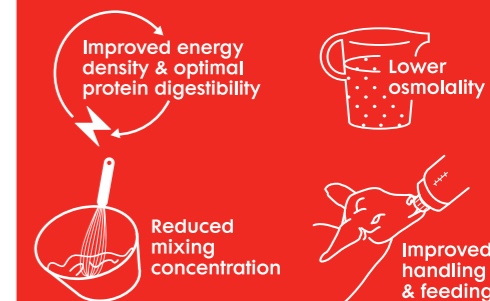
Milkivit ELM has been designed to help lambs achieve their full growth potential. Milkivit ELM is a precisely formulated lamb milk replacer containing specially selected milk products, highly digestible oils and proteins plus vitamins and minerals to satisfy the requirements of fast-growing lambs.

The formulation has been specifically developed with four key benefits in mind:

- Improved energy density and optimal protein digestibility
- Reduced mixing concentration
- Lower osmolality
- Improved handling and feeding



The key benefits of Milkivit ELM



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Forum members met at the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto, Canada.

Sharing sustainable solutions through the Global Sheep Producers Forum

The Global Sheep Producers Forum (GSPF) shared insights into the challenges being faced by the sector across the globe, when forum partners met in Canada in November.

NSA is an active and supportive member of GSPF, a group that provides a common voice for the global sheep community and reflects a collective vision of the future sustainability of the sector.

It fosters global collaboration to develop evidenced and united positions and collective actions that address the shared challenges and opportunities facing the sheep industry, irrespective of global boundaries.

Dan Phipps, NSA Chairman and a sheep farmer from Suffolk, attended the November meeting on behalf of NSA, held in Toronto, Ontario, to coincide with the 100th Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

International forum

He reports: "How sensible in principle, I thought, when I heard of GSPF. On a national level when NSA brings people together, we quickly discover how much we have in common and how much can be learnt from talking together about different experiences. Why should this not equate on an international level?"

"So when asked if I would represent NSA in Toronto, I couldn't say no."

Environmental sustainability is a key topic for GSPF and, highlighting its importance to society as a whole, the trip to Canada was placed in jeopardy by climate change protesters near Heathrow.

"Police were on every bridge, gantry or other structure that spanned the M25, to stop people from chaining or gluing themselves to them,"

says Mr Phipps. "The whole motorway was in chaos and it took 3.5 hours to cover the 83 miles to the airport."

"Arriving in Toronto eight hours later, we discovered we should have taken t-shirts not jumpers. The temperature at 21°C was unusually high, but quickly corrected itself to -3°C five days later. It made me question if we should have joined those chained to the motorway gantry, as it is apparent strange weather patterns are something all nations have in common."



Dan and his partner Lynne squeezed in a spot of sightseeing at Niagara Falls.

Mr Phipps met the GSPF delegates in the Sheep Barn at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, where a wide range of UK native breeds were included in the judging.

"The show gained its royal title from our own King George V in 1920, so I shouldn't have been surprised by the strong British connection with sheep breeds and the familiar faces of Suffolk, Oxford Down, Lincoln, Southdown, Hampshire, Dorset, North Country Cheviot, Charollais and Texel competitors," he says, commenting that the role UK genetics play on a global stage shouldn't be forgotten within debates about meat imports and exports.

Members of GSPF include the American Lamb Board, Beef and Lamb New Zealand, Canadian Sheep Federation, National Wool Growers South Africa, Sheep Producers Australia and, from the UK, AHDB and NSA.

"It was a great opportunity to sit in a room with likeminded people and discuss how organisations can work together to further support collective objectives. There was a focus on how the industry globally needs to encourage and develop methods to inspire young people to get involved and build careers in the industry," says Mr Phipps, adding that his contribution to highlight NSA Next Generation activity demonstrated opportunities for other nations to follow suit.

Joint objectives

Mr Phipps continues: "We discussed how we could raise the industry profile, tell the sustainability story, inspire consumption, champion industry best practice, ignite innovation and many things beyond."

"Besides Canada's stunning hospitality and scenery, my conclusion is all nations involved in GSPF had and will continue to have a huge input. It put faces to names of the leading figures in the industry from across the nations and gave all partners an insight into the challenges being experienced across the globe."

"There is huge potential within this forum to work together to strengthen and build our industry globally. My initial thought that GSPF is sensible in principle is now backed up by knowledge it is sensible in reality."

NSA thanks the Canadian Sheep Federation for hosting the trip. More on GSPF at www.globalsheepforum.com.

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NSA members reflect on E-Organic trips around Europe

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For the past two years, NSA has been the sole UK partner in an EU-funded, Turkish-led research project called E-Organic Erasmus.

The main aim of the project was to bring together countries to share good practice techniques when it comes to livestock farming, with a particular focus on organic.

Collaboration between partners in Italy, Spain and Turkey has allowed NSA to assist in building a free-to-access online resource covering a range of topics and livestock species, for farmers and allied industries across Europe.

NSA hosted groups of international vets, lecturers and advisers on two UK trips. It also enabled NSA to send two members to each of the partner countries to experience conventional, regenerative and organic farming methods

abroad. Mike Adams and James MacCartney were selected through an interview process in summer 2021 and are now actively sharing their insights.

Global presence

Nicola Noble, NSA Project Manager, comments: "The project has increased NSA's international presence, offering greater opportunity to improve the global standards of sheep farming. At a time where farmers are battling weather extremes alongside sustainability challenges, learning from those already affected by long hot summers, periods of extreme drought and flash floods can only be of benefit. It's clear from the UK visits and well attended NSA Erasmus events, we are all searching for adaptive solutions in these uncertain times."

The free e-learning resources will be published at www.eorganic.eu in early 2023.



While the consortium enjoyed hot UK temperatures, the livestock sought shade.

Nomadic lifestyles allow animals to graze the stark Turkish landscape.



Agroforestry is a popular diversification option in Spain and Portugal.



European farmers are forced to house livestock during high temperatures.



Drought resistant wheat breeding programs are underway in Turkey.

Agroforestry aids diversification options and provides for nature

By Mike Adams, NSA member, Rutland

This opportunity with NSA came at just the right time for me, as I had just started organic conversion on my own farm and had many questions.

It became clear producers in the countries we visited were experiencing similar challenges to the UK – but the variation between farms and countries in their approach to combatting this and adapting their systems and practices was the most inspiring part of the journey and really motivated my interest.

The main common challenge was climatic challenges – extended periods of dry weather, erratic rainfall and increasing high temperatures.

Second were the financial challenges posed by increased input costs, reducing output values and unpredictable markets and trends. Finally social challenges, such as changes in consumer behaviour, changes in diet and increasing interest in food provenance.

I never really understood agroforestry before. To me it seemed like neither one thing or the other. Something to ruin decent land and make farming 'in between' more hard work.

In Spain and Portugal trees are commonly used to provide shade for grazing animals. The grass grows better in partial shade and the cooler soil temperature means less evaporation of valuable soil moisture. Livestock graze small bushes

between the trees and the lower leaves of the trees themselves, which prevents overgrowth and also provides valuable nutrients and minerals.

In Portugal we visited Montado Freixo Do Meio, a mixed farm with cattle grazing beneath the trees, browsing tree leaves and bushes. There were oak trees in the silvopasture system producing acorns, processed to make plant-based burgers, roasted to make coffee and spare acorns even used to fatten pigs to make speciality hams. They had diversified further with cork trees, which provided further shade and provided a harvest of cork.

Trees were planted in rows with small bushes between them. Different varieties led to different heights of trees bearing varied crops with vegetables flourishing in the cool soils provided by the shade of the trees.

Diversification

Alfredo, the farmer, explained his next project was to have vines growing in the alleys adding more shade, crops and revenue streams.

It may be easy to imagine this 'farm' as a smallholding run by someone who had a few crazy ideas, read too many eco books and watched too many off the wall youtube videos, but the reality was the opposite. It was a 600ha (1,480acre) farm employing 30 people and producing more than 300 different products – a role model for diversification.



Mike's involvement in the project has changed his view on agroforestry.

Turkey was the complete opposite. Government institutions were breeding varieties of drought resistant wheat, rather than trying to adapt the environment to create shade and prevent water loss. We visited a breeding program aiming for sheep that will fatten on a very low quality diet. From what I could see was mainly chopped straw.

I asked some of our Turkish hosts about agroforestry and other methods to improve the environment, create shade, build soil and preserve water. They were adamant this wasn't an option in Turkey as trees were too expensive and hard to establish. They were of the opinion they were 'past the point of no return', leaving plants and animals bred to cope with the degraded environment as their only option.

So the man that didn't get agroforestry is already working to create mixed alleys of trees with arable and forage crops between. If I learnt nothing else, it's that we cannot afford to get into a position where we are past the point for action.

Increasing resilience through value adding and enterprise stacking

By James MacCartney, NSA member, Rutland

The trips to Italy and Spain provided me with a valuable insight into both organic and sustainable farming in Europe.

It was impressive to see the array of delicious food being produced on farms dealing with increasing climate pressure, by farmers adapting their businesses by adding value and stacking enterprises in order to thrive.

What struck me most was the connection producers had with their product, almost as though it was an extension of their personality, so ingrained they were with it. Granted they would all be classed as artisan producers in this country, but I did feel there were significant lessons to be learnt and applied in the UK.

I'm very proud of the finished lambs and cattle from our farm, but I need to explore what we can do to further improve the quality. We produce

lambs to the required specification but it feels like there is a lack of emphasis on eating quality from both retailers and producers.

The other striking difference between the European farms and those in the UK is that they were all integrated into society more widely. Two of the farms we visited had nursery/pre-schools on site, one had a social care centre for young people with disabilities, and several of them were cooperatives, both with other farmers and with other parts of the supply chain.

Educating consumers

Do we do enough to educate our customers on the benefits of the products we produce? I sometimes just send them on the wagon and forget about them. This is increasingly important in a time when environmental concerns are threatening how we produce food, and something



James will promote his farm and produce with the local community.

I will look to change in my own community by inviting more people out on to farm.

Alfredo, a farmer on the Portuguese/Spanish border, said something that stuck with me: "We all want to be millionaires, and if we all want to be millionaires the cooperative will not succeed." Perhaps taking on the attitude of working together and not just going it alone is something we can do more of here. We have a powerful network in UK agriculture that could be better utilised to farm cooperatively.



The shipment of lamb to the US is a historic moment for red meat exports.

NSA extremely encouraged as first exports of Welsh lamb hit US soil

The USA has the potential to bring a major financial boost to the UK sheep sector, after the first shipment of British lamb arrived there after nearly two decades.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "The USA is proving a valuable market for red meat exports, with shipments of pork and beef worth more than £24m in the first seven months of 2022. This is fantastic news for the British sheep industry, and it comes after many years of hard work by AHDB, working closely with our other levy bodies.

"The success of our sheep industry is based on market opportunities, and access to the US will offer just that, building on what is already a healthy demand for high-quality British lamb."



Treating US importers to a UK lamb carvery has been part of the export effort.

Import rules

Last December, Defra announced the United States Department of Agriculture had amended the small ruminants rule preventing imports of lamb from the UK into the US, with the change coming into force in January 2022.

After months of anticipation, processing firm Dunbia exported the first consignment across to the US in October, from its site in Carmarthenshire. The arrival of this first shipment of Welsh lamb was enjoyed by a gathering of US industry leaders at the Meat Importers Council of America's annual conference.

Mr Stocker continues: "The moves by US authorities to allow the export of lamb from the UK have created the first trading opportunity

in 20 years with the nation. Trade with the US is estimated by AHDB to be worth £37m to the sheep sector in the first five years of trade. It is extremely encouraging to see a trade deal that provides opportunity for UK sheep meat producers."

Export ambitions

Dr Phil Hadley, AHDB, said this first shipment was a 'milestone for the UK sheep sector's export ambitions' – with hopes it would be the 'first of many orders' from the USA.

As part of the ongoing work to build the reputation of UK red meat exports, AHDB brought five American red meat importers to the UK this summer, visiting retailers, processors and farmers as well as attending the NSA Sheep Event,

allowing them to explore what opportunities exist for the lamb sector.

In November, AHDB also hosted a reception in Miami where 50 guests, including importers, sampled a lamb carvery and watched a butchery demonstration highlighting the versatility and innovation of red meat from the UK.

Dr Hadley concludes: "The US is a hugely important market for our red meat exports and AHDB will continue to explore opportunities to increase volumes of UK meat onto plates across the US. It's clear levy payers value the work of the export team in opening new markets and helping to boost overseas trade. This shipment of lamb to the US shows the importance of AHDB's investment and its export work in supporting commercial trade."

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Breakthrough in exports of UK ovine embryo genetics to the USA

While efforts to export lamb into the USA have received plenty of press attention, concurrent work to remove barriers for sheep genetics has also been underway.

As a result of the joint work by AHDB, the UK Export Certificate Partnership and NSA, a new health certificate was secured in early November, allowing UK ovine embryos to be exported to America after a 26-year absence.

There has been access for UK ovine semen since 2016 and it is predicted the additional of embryos has a potential export value of £1.17m in the first 12 months.

Restrictions lifted

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "This welcome resumption of trade in genetics to the US comes after a huge amount of work to lift the small ruminant rule imposed by the United States Department of Agriculture as a result of the BSE crisis in the 1990s.

"The new certificate has the potential to create opportunities for a wide range of native and more recently introduced sheep breeds here in the UK. And equally important for global sheep farming, it provides an opportunity for US sheep farmers to introduce new genetics to further develop their industry and to protect a number of native British breeds already present there. For many years Britain had a reputation as the 'stockyard of the world' and it's great to see steps returning us to that status."

Dr Matt Rolleston, US vet and livestock reproductive specialist, has experience importing UK ovine genetics, bringing in 8,000 straws of UK sheep semen for his own Bluefaced Leicester



US sheep breeders are interested in a number of traditional UK sheep breeds.

and Scottish Blackface flocks, as well as genetics for US clients. He reports a high level of interest in the new opportunity for embryos – placing a significant value on the potential trade.

"The most surprising thing is the number of UK breeders in contact looking to make connections on the US side. Some are even looking for cost sharing to put their embryos in front of US breeders," he says.

In the first year, Dr Rolleston anticipates 2,000 embryos worth approximately £380 each to head to the US from the UK sheep industry, with earnings estimated at £750,000 for UK sheep breeders.

He says: "I personally believe the commercial embryos at £335-£420 would lead to larger volume buy-ins on the US side, resulting in breeders buying higher numbers."

Dr Rolleston predicts demand for traditional UK breeds and commercial breeds already established in the country, such as British Texel, Suffolk, Scottish Blackface, Bluefaced Leicester, Teeswater, Wensleydale, Kerry Hill and South Country Cheviot.

He says there is also interest in breeds not yet present in the US, such as the Dutch Spotted, Charollais and Lleyn, and specific high-value demand for the Swiss Valais Blacknose as a 'novelty' breed.

Valais Blacknose females are currently trading for up to £25,000 in the USA, with 400 embryos coming in per year from New Zealand at £1,700 each. These NZ genetics are from UK embryos so, Dr Rolleston says, there is no reason to believe this will not swap to a direct trade with the UK.

Away from the current fashion for Valais Blacknoses, Dr Rolleston's attention is drawn by British heritage breeds, due to demand for fine-wooled breeds popular to a growing US home and small-scale fibre manufacturing sector. This is significant and likely to encourage imports of embryos to bolster often meagre gene pools of traditional UK origin wool breeds.

Conformation focus

John Wilkes, AHDB's US Agricultural Consultant, says there is also desire in some part of the US market to change carcass conformation, and that will open the door for other UK breeders.

He says: "Currently there are no pedigree Charollais sheep in the USA, but breeders are looking to how Canada and Mexico have increased numbers of UK Charollais sheep with rams used for prime lamb production. These flocks were established by genetic imports.

"In the US the average lamb carcass weight is 30kg. By producing a smaller, meatier carcass of 20kg for a burgeoning ethnic US market, UK terminal sires such as Texel and Suffolk have significant potential."

Mr Stocker concludes: "It is clear there is interest in British sheep genetics from countries right across the world. NSA Sheep 2022 was an event that showcased our industry to many visitors from the USA, South America and central and eastern Europe. Increasingly this isn't just a trade in genetics. It leads to longer term relationships, advice and aftercare, maintaining our reputation as one of the leading sheep producing nations in the world."



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Trade of UK genetics to the US has been restored.

NSA Chief Executive's achievement as winner of esteemed farming award

NSA was thrilled to join the celebrations at the British Farming Awards in October as Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, was presented with the prestigious outstanding contribution to British agriculture award.

This esteemed award is designed to recognise one individual's dedication to the farming industry – and NSA was thrilled to see Phil recognised, knowing his passion to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector is second to none.

His role at NSA started in 2011, before that enjoying 20 years' experience in practical farming and farm management and 14 years working in policy at the Soil Association. During his time at NSA he has transformed the membership association and contributed with confidence and authority to discussions at all levels on sheep health and welfare, genetics, trade, farm support, the environmental, rural sustainability and the wealth of public goods that sheep provide to society.

Strong representation

His integrity, commitment and enthusiasm mean regular invitations to decision-making forums and key events in the industry, leading to strengthened representation for the sheep sector in policymaking and trade.

Phil says: "I feel incredibly grateful and humbled to win this award. Agriculture is one of the best and most fundamental industries in the world, producing food and looking after the countryside and the wider environment, and sheep farming is central to a growing interest in sustainable farming where we integrate the protection and enhancement of our natural environment with producing food and fibre.

"It's easy for us, as farmers, to keep our heads down and get on with our work, but awards such as these give us all the chance to sit back and celebrate the hard work of so many people who contribute to the future of farming.

"While this award may have my name on it, there are a lot of people – colleagues and family – who are also responsible and who have given me huge support throughout my career. If I have any advice, it is to surround yourself with good people who share your values, interests and ethics – its teamwork and collaboration that has a real impact."

Forward thinking

With his work at NSA and own personal interest, Phil is involved in the driving forward of many agricultural and environmental groups. His involvement with ELMS since its inception, creating farm-led forums and facilitating dialogue between Defra and NSA pilot participants, perfectly exemplifies the valuable role he plays in creating the link between producer and policymaker.

Likewise, initiatives Phil has spearheaded, such as the NSA Next Generation programme, the newly formed Register of Sheep Advisers and an increasing number of research and development projects, has increased knowledge exchange between farmers and bridged the gap between farmers, vets, researchers and other industry experts.

Active involvement in British Heritage Sheep, the Campaign for Wool and other programmes has increased understanding and appreciation of sheep farming within an incredible range of non-farmers.



Phil was humbled to receive his well-deserved outstanding achievement award.

Congratulations from NSA

As a highly respected and much-loved member of the farming industry, many colleagues and associates of Mr Stocker have joined NSA in congratulating him on this outstanding achievement.

NSA Chair Dan Phipps

"This award title sums up exactly what Phil is giving British agriculture - an outstanding contribution. He stands out as a man of his time, with clear thinking around sheep farming and how it fits into a modern, changing world.

"He is unassuming and kind natured with a vision and clarity for the prosperity of our industry. He understands the pressures sheep keepers face daily. Be it the weather, financial or a sheep's ability to get the better of you just when you think you've cracked it, Phil has lived it."



Past NSA Chair Bryan Griffiths

"Phil is a gifted and eloquent communicator, at ease with everyone within the industry from the youngest new entrant to the Secretary of State. His thorough understanding of all aspects of the sheep industry, together with his enthusiasm and natural charm, has earned him a seat on every decision-making forum within the industry.

"Throughout his time at NSA, Phil has championed the need to produce food and fibre sustainably from an enhanced environment. Current world thinking in so many ways reflects the concepts Phil has been advocating for decades."



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Grassland management and flock health were high priority topics for this ambassador group.

Ambassadors gain advice and friendships from a year with NSA Next Generation

Having attended their final delivery session this autumn, full of valuable information, these NSA Next Generation Ambassadors have taken time to reflect upon their year of personal and professional development. Here they share what they have taken from the programme.



Katie Evans Norfolk



The Next Generation Ambassador programme has been an amazing experience. I've come away from every session with new knowledge and ideas. It has also been a great way to learn more about farming in other areas of the UK.

Some highlights for me included the visit to Marc Jones' farm in Wales. His livestock system and grassland management were both interesting and impressive. I really enjoyed our sheep health discussions, in particular about actions to take at lambing time.

It was a great session for gaining tips and new ideas. Having seen the results from colostrum quality studies, I went home and purchased a refractometer and a colostrum milker. Two great pieces of kit for improving colostrum management.

Although I am sad the programme has come to an end, I am excited to see what the future brings and look forward to staying involved with NSA.

Alexander Boyd County Antrim



I have thoroughly enjoyed the past year. Every aspect of the Next Generation programme has been fantastic. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part.

My favourite session focussed on the supply chain. I found this very interesting, especially the live-to-kill training day with AHDB's Steve Powdrill. I learnt a lot from being able to see and judge the lambs before they were slaughtered, and then viewing their carcasses afterwards, seeing how big a variation there was in our judgement.

One thing I have learnt from the wide range of people I met was to always keep an open mind. Always be keen to try and learn new things, because unless you do, you don't know what you're missing. I am looking forward to implementing this on my own farm in Northern Ireland and it will be interesting to see where the future direction of the UK sheep industry lies.

Ed Brant Lincolnshire



The NSA Next Generation programme has been extremely enjoyable and valuable. I have taken huge amounts of knowledge from each session and always found myself looking forward to next one.

Over the year we had some fantastic speakers and visited some thought-provoking farmers. It was not just the systems, but the mindset of these farmers that was great to witness and has changed how I approach our farm, hurdles I come across, and plans for the future. I feel I have learned so much and have really developed my thinking and understanding.

One of my favourite sessions focussed on the supply chain. We started at Marc Jones' farm looking at grazing management and farm business. There was so much to take on and it really was a next level farm. We then had talks from AHDB looking at genetics and the marketing of lambs followed by an interesting visit to an abattoir.

Beth Phalp North Yorkshire



I have thoroughly enjoyed every part of the NSA Next Generation programme and feel very lucky to have been given the opportunity to be part of it.

Each of the four delivery sessions was incredibly informative, looking into flock health, supply/food chain, grassland management and business management. I have taken new ideas and inspiration from them all, and gained some great friends and made fantastic contacts over the year.

The most useful session for me was looking at different grass leys, including visiting farmers who are already using improved grassland management to reduce reliance on feed and, in doing so, reducing costs - something I'm keen to move towards at home.

A couple of changes we have made at home include establishing new grass leys with red clover, sending some lambs direct for processing and looking into the viability of different practices on the farm.

Karyn McArthur Glasgow



I am very grateful to all at NSA to be chosen for this year's Next Generation Ambassador programme. It is a year I will certainly not forget in a hurry.

I have loved every minute of the programme, from meeting new friends to seeing some fantastic systems and learning from brilliant people within the industry - what's not to love! I have enjoyed all the sessions, particularly those on diversification that have led me to look with fresh views on what route I would like to go down and how I would like to diversify our family business to make it work for all involved.

The programme is a fantastic opportunity for young people within the industry and something I would encourage anyone to get involved with.

Clover Crosse Wiltshire



Having been a part of the covid-interrupted 2020 NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme, I was so grateful for the opportunity to join the 2022 group. It did not disappoint.

All our trips away were enjoyable. I particularly benefitted from our visits to the Farmers Fresh abattoir and British Wool processing plant. They are parts of the industry I've not had much exposure to, but to see the whole picture, from what we do on farm, right through to a product on the shelf, was brilliant.

The most unique part of the NSA ambassador programme is the networking opportunity. We have met and will continue to meet many industry leaders through NSA. Having the opportunity to ask them questions is invaluable.



Having the opportunity to meet with progressive farmers inspired the group

Perry Parkinson Dumfries



This last year has been a real honour and privilege. I didn't really know what to expect when I signed up but can honestly say it's blown any expectations I had out of the water.

Every workshop we attended meant something to each one of us on a different level and, without even knowing it, made us realise what we were on the programme for in the first place. I've made friends for life while meeting some incredible farmers and industry leaders along the way. This has already helped me in my career through contacts, advice and new people to pick their brains about certain ideas.

I'd truly recommend this programme to any young shepherds out there looking to gain more knowledge, meet new people or to just get themselves out there.

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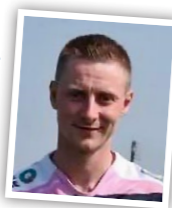
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Michael Burley Rhondda

The programme has been one of the best things I have done since leaving university. Expanding my knowledge of the sheep industry, meeting like mind people and personal goal setting have been the fundamentals of the programme.

We have visited some incredible places and met some very positive, forward-thinking people, encouraging me greatly. The farm tours were brilliant to see different systems and meet the people who manage them. I was really impressed by our chat with Adam Henson on our first trip and the flock health workshops we did with Phillippa Page.

Our final trip to Hexham and the sessions with the agricultural business advisers really resonated with me, as it gave us all a real insight into preparing budgets and applying for farm tenancies.

This was backed up by the session with Development Consultant Wyn Owen, who facilitated a goal setting and career pathway exercise and gave me the encouragement to share my goals and identify a step-by-step approach.

The major talking point of the programme has to be the friends you make and people you meet along the way. The inspiration, confidence, learning and friendships you come away with are second to none and I personally now feel closer to reaching my ambitions than ever before.

Elsa Amiss Cornwall

Being part of the group has been an amazing and incredibly fun opportunity. The range of farms, businesses, and speakers we have had the chance to meet has shown us many aspects of the sheep industry.

Be it learning about grassland management, from farmers and seed companies, experiencing a live-to-kill day with AHDB and Farmers Fresh, or learning business management and personal development skills, the ambassador programme has broadened my knowledge in all aspects of sheep farming, processing and marketing.

Meeting the other ambassadors has also been fantastic. The diversity of knowledge and interest in different aspects of the industry across the group has taught me so much. I have already implemented many of the things I learnt, improving how I select lambs for slaughter and management of herbal leys. A big thank you to NSA. I look forward to being more involved with the association in the future.

Sophie Wernham Berkshire

Being part of the NSA Next Generation programme 2022 has been such a great experience. Being able to travel to different parts of the country with a fantastic group of likeminded people has been so beneficial.

I've not only taken away ideas and inspiration but it has also had a positive impact on my own personal development and confidence.

I have already started to implement small changes within my flock after a fascinating few days spent with sheep vet Phillippa Page. Learning about marginal gains and the big impact you can have by making small changes was a great place to start with improving the health of the flock.

We have also increased how often we do faecal egg counts than in previous years - another small change with a positive influence seen already.

George Ellis Gloucestershire

The ambassador programme has been so much more than I expected. It has been an eventful year with great, like-minded people. I have learnt a lot and can't thank the team at NSA enough for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this.

From participating I have learnt just how many great people there are in this industry who want to help, give you advice and open opportunities to succeed.

My favourite part of the programme was visiting Marc Jones' impressive farm near Welshpool learning about his use of legumes and herbal leys to increase animal performance.

Cameron Farnan Suffolk

I am grateful to have been involved within the 2022 NSA Next Generation programme.

The in-depth Barenbrug grass breeding tour was particularly helpful to improve my knowledge of forage and I will look to incorporate more drought resistant species into future leys - this could be key in our area.

The networking opportunities the programme has provided will prove invaluable for my future endeavours within the industry. This autumn I have established an organic flock based within an arable rotation. The ambassador programme has certainly helped me evaluate different options more objectively and set out targets for future progression of the flock.

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2. Henry J. Assessment of S. Aureus vaccine against mastitis in UK flocks. ISVC 2017 Oral communication

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The 2022 ambassadors received their award certificates to round-up the years learning.

Next Generation international study trips

Young sheep farmers Lucy May Griffiths from Presteigne, Powys, and Perry Parkinson from Dumfries have been selected as the winners of the 2022-2024 NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation.

The award comes in the form of two generous £2,750 travel bursaries to support the enthusiastic young shepherds on study trips to explore the application of science and innovation in sheep farming. The bursaries are funded by NSA in partnership with the Company of the Merchants of the Staple of England (the Staple).

After being shortlisted from many high calibre applications, Lucy and Perry both impressed a panel of judges including NSA, industry representatives and Stephen Fell from the Staple, to be selected as recipients of the bursaries this year.

Planning stage

Lucy and Perry are now in the initial stages of planning their study trips, with both aiming to travel to New Zealand using the funds from the award.

Lucy, who is a final year student at Harper Adams University and farms with her family on their mixed farm in mid Wales, plans to investigate different options for overwintering stock on her trip. Perry, who is currently head shepherd at SRUC's Barony College Campus is looking to study anthelmintic resistance in sheep.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "After the world of travel was closed for so long due to the pandemic it is especially pleasing to be able to award the bursaries to Lucy and Perry this year. All at NSA and the Staple are excited to be part of their journeys and wish them the very best with their studies."



Lucy May Griffiths.



Perry Parkinson.



Workshops are an important part of the NSA Next Generation Winter programme.

Free workshops for January 2023

NSA Next Generation is set for another busy year with plans already in place for several exciting events and activities.

Kicking off activity in 2023 will be the two rescheduled Winter Conferences, taking place at Skipton Auction Mart on Tuesday 24th January and Ashford Livestock Market on Thursday 26th January. Originally planned for November 2022, the two workshop-focused events will start 2023 with a bang.

With dates now set, young sheep farmers from across the UK will be able to benefit from a range of interesting workshops delivered by leading names from the UK sheep sector.

A particular highlight at the Skipton event will be a practical sheep dog demonstration from the International Sheep Dog Society giving advice on how to get the best from your working dog. At Ashford, NSA will welcome popular social media farming influencers the Chief Shepherdess and the Super Serious Farmer, also known as Zoe Colville and Kriss Woodhead, to the event.

The Winter Conferences are suitable for anyone already working in the sector or students with a specific interest in sheep farming. They are free to attend with a delicious hot meal thrown in. [Bookings are now open for both conferences at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.](http://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk)

Join NSA in the heart of London

Shortly after the Winter Conferences in January the NSA Westminster visit returns, giving young sheep farmers with a particular interest in agricultural policy the chance to quiz the people in power.

Having successfully taken a group to London back in 2019, following by a covid hiatus, the trip is now part of the Next Generation two-year cycle of events. Including a visit to the Houses of Commons and

Lords, the main aim is for young sheep farmers to get face to face with MPs and Defra representatives to discuss the direction of future farming policy and how it will affect the producers of tomorrow.

Applications to join the visit will open just after Christmas with the visit provisionally planned for early February 2023. Interested parties should continue to keep an eye on the NSA Next Generation website and NSA social media accounts for news of spring and summer activities. There is lots planned for an exciting year ahead.

Meet key decision makers on the NSA Westminster trip.



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Independent advice valued by next generation sheep farmer

By Katie James, NSA



Josh Starling from Colchester, Essex, was the last of the lucky winners from this summer's NSA and Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) mentoring competition to receive valuable guidance.

Josh entered the NSA and RoSA competition to gain advice on the best grazing methods for his flock of 114 mixed breed sheep – an enterprise he is hoping to grow to facilitate a move to full time farming. With this in mind, Josh was matched with experienced adviser Matt Blyth, of Blyth Livestock Advisory Services, a great believer himself in the benefits of advice from others outside of one's own business.

Mentoring

Matt says: "I was more than happy to be involved in this opportunity to help a new, young entrant to the sector. All the way though my career I have been lucky enough to have people supporting me with useful advice. For the past 15 years I have had a mentor myself and think it's something the industry should encourage more.

"Many of us are working alone, making it easy to get fixated on things. Having someone to bounce ideas off, whether that be a friend, neighbour or an independent adviser, has many benefits. Not just for improvement of your own enterprise but for mental support too. An independent view, given from looking over the hedge can help spot ideas or give suggestions. That can help and, even if that is not the case, it can give you a different viewpoint and make you think about your routines or systems."



Josh has changed his grazing management since Matt's advice.



Matt highlighted the value of SCOPS principles on worm control.

Matt visited Josh's farm in Essex, spending time looking at his livestock and chatting about the business, it's past and Josh's hopes for it's future.

As Josh had hoped, Matt was able to advise him on making the best of his grassland. Josh says: "Matt explained some of the practices we were regularly undertaking really weren't necessary and were potentially for cosmetic reasons only. Instead of topping our grass when it gets too long and stalky, Matt suggested we leave it as a standing hay crop over winter to run our Dorset ewes and lambs across after lambing in November.

"He also suggested we measure our grass instead of just moving sheep routinely every three weeks. It could be they need moving before the three-week mark or perhaps we can get grazing for longer from some fields."

One of the biggest changes Matt encouraged for Josh was more enforced following of the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) principals. Josh says: "We didn't really quarantine our bought in sheep before but Matt highlighted exactly why it is so important to do this, so we

definitely will from now on. We spoke about our worming regime and I now feel more confident on which products to use."

Matt also suggested options to improve the flock's lamb grades, recommending many useful resources provided by levy bodies and others at no charge. He also advised looking out for live to dead training days to hone lamb selection skills and therefore improve profitability.

Continued support

Often working with an adviser is a process that requires frequent two-way communication. Matt has therefore offered Josh open contact for the next six months, meaning real progress can be made for Josh's flock.

Josh concludes: "I am really pleased I entered this competition. Matt's advice has been great and really helpful. We are now following it and look forward to seeing the difference it can make to our sheep performance."

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Local FCN volunteers will meet on farm to discuss individual situations.

Volunteers walk with those in need of support

By Emily Davies, FCN volunteer



I am proud to be a volunteer for the Farming Community Network (FCN), a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community.

FCN helped my family and this is the main reason I decided to volunteer with FCN, to give something back.

Across England and Wales the charity has around 400 volunteers, and many of us are involved in farming or have close links with agriculture. You don't need me to tell you that farming is complex. It is unlike any other industry. So it's important, when a farmer is looking for someone to talk to, the volunteer at the end of the phone speaks the unique language of farming.

Devastation

In 2010 we discovered the devastating news our family farm was going to be taken from us through compulsory purchase to make way for a new trainline. It was a very dark time for my family, and it's difficult to put into words the emotional upset it caused, leading to 10 years of stress, trauma, upset and depression.

In 2020, coupled with lockdown, my mum was in a very bad way with her depression. She contacted FCN and, through the help and guidance of its volunteers, they began to help her find a positive way forward.

It wasn't only my mum who suffered. Losing my farm brought me the same amount of grief as losing a loved one. The farm had been in our family for 108 years. That's 108 years of blood, sweat and tears, history, heritage, births, marriages, deaths and identity.

Without the identity of being a farmer's daughter, I felt I needed to maintain my

connection to farming, but I also wanted to help FCN, the amazing charity that helped us.

As a journalist and marketing professional, I play to my strengths when it comes to volunteering, talking to members of the public about FCN, its role and activities. I aim to promote FCN's message by raising awareness of the confidential, national helpline, and encouraging those interested in giving something back to volunteer themselves.

Support

FCN supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times. The helpline and e-helpline are confidential and you can talk to a sympathetic person who understands farming and rural life.

Calls that come through the helpline can be referred to local volunteers, who will arrange a meeting with the caller and provide ongoing support if needed, and walk with them to talk through their situation.

Through the online FarmWell resource, the charity is also working proactively to build a healthy farming future through information and support for farmers looking to keep their business strong and resilient, manage change, workplace stress and access self-help.

The charity regularly develops publications to support the farming community, gets involved in academic research, delivers training to the agricultural industry and attends/coordinates national and local events for the farming community, taking a positive approach to supporting British agriculture.

Volunteering for FCN has been one of the best decisions I've ever made. If you're thinking about volunteering and you're connected to rural culture, I strongly recommend signing up.

The FCN confidential helpline (03000 111999) and e-helpline (help@fcn.org.uk) are open 7am-11pm, 365 days a year. More at www.fcn.org.uk and www.farmwell.org.uk.



Volunteers at FCN speak the language of farming.

How to spot, treat and control twin lamb disease pre and post lambing

As lambing time approaches the perennial problem of pregnancy toxæmia will become an issue for shepherds and vets alike. More commonly known as twin lamb disease, it is a condition which many of us who have cared for pregnant ewes will be all too familiar with.

What does twin lamb disease look like? The signs in the initial stages of the disease can be subtle, but are usually recognised by experienced shepherds. A ewe isolating from the flock, or hanging back slightly, should start alarm bells ringing. Going off its feed and not joining the scrum at the trough are also signs and, if left untreated, the ewe will deteriorate, become uncoordinated, wobbly and sometimes going blind. Following this, the ewe will go off her legs, collapse and eventually slip into a coma before dying.

So, why does twin lamb disease progress from mild behavioural changes all the way to death? Ewes in late pregnancy have many metabolic stresses. Around 70% of foetal growth takes place in the last eight weeks of pregnancy. To achieve this rapid growth, lambs require increasing amounts of glucose from their mother. To compensate for this, surely the ewe should be eating for two, or even three? In theory that's all well and good, but in practice it is not as straightforward.

Reduced intake

As the lambs grow rapidly inside the ewe they take up more and more space within the abdomen, space which would usually be occupied by the rumen. This reduction in space leads to a reduction in feed intake and the ewe has to produce the glucose needed from internal fat stores.

As fat is broken down to produce glucose other substances called ketones are also produced. As ketone levels in the blood rise and glucose levels drop, the brain is effectively starved of glucose, leading to the signs of odd behaviour, wobbliness, eventual coma and death.

Reduced feed intake and increased demand for calcium for lamb growth and the start of lactation causes ewes to become low in calcium.



Calcium deficiency inhibits the ewe's ability to produce glucose, exacerbating the twin lamb disease.

In its own right hypocalcaemia is a dangerous condition for heavily pregnant ewes, presenting with similar signs to twin lamb disease. Many ewes suffering from twin lamb disease are suffering from calcium deficiency at the same time.

Ewes with twin lamb disease have been found to have increased levels of inflammatory markers in their blood, which further inhibits the ability to produce glucose. This inflammation is thought to be a major contributing factor to the deaths of ewes with twin lamb disease. Studies have shown the addition of a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) alongside treatment providing energy sources can increase ewe survival rates by 50%, a finding which mirrors our first-hand experience in veterinary practice of treating these cases.

Treatment

How can we treat twin lamb disease? The problems presented by twin lamb are threefold: energy deficiency, calcium deficiency and inflammation. The energy deficiency can be corrected by giving glucose, but this only works if administered intravenously.

Oral glucose in ruminants is lost in the rumen, as the natural bacteria living in the rumen quickly take any glucose administered orally for themselves, meaning none makes it into the ewe. What we can give orally are glucose precursors, namely propionate, glycerol and propylene-glycol. These substances are of little interest to the rumen bacteria, but the ewe can quickly and easily use them to make glucose for herself.

Calcium can be given in the form of intravenous or subcutaneous injections of calcium borogluconate, or oral forms of calcium can be administered. While both injectable and oral calcium can be effective, oral is easier to administer and can provide a longer lasting calcium boost to the ewe.

The third aspect, inflammation, is easily combatted by NSAIDs. I always advise the use of NSAIDs whenever treating cases of twin lamb. My personal choice for providing energy and calcium is a combination product such as Ewe-Go, which provides multiple sources of energy and a calcium supply in one oral product.

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Helen and Clive enjoy their mix of commercial and pedigree breeds.

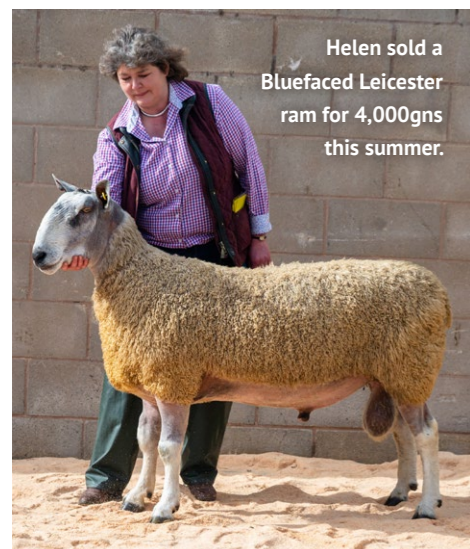
Commercial and pedigree success brings pride to Welsh borders farm

By Katie James, NSA

With her long career with the association, involvement with several breed societies, a talent for organising agricultural events and her general passion for the UK sheep sector, Helen Roberts is a well-known face inside and outside NSA.

She is NSA Corporate Sales Manager and NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Development Officer, and feels as at home organising sheep events as she is representing the views of sheep farmers to Welsh Government officials.

Helen's introduction to NSA came from her lifelong interest in pedigree breeds, which was fostered by her father – Jack Pryce – from the early days of supporting his and his highly regarded Horton Suffolk flock in showrings across the country and at the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale.



Helen sold a Bluefaced Leicester ram for 4,000gns this summer.

Helen now shares this passion with husband Clive at Orseddwen, their upland farm near Oswestry, on the Shropshire/Clwyd border with Offa's Dyke running through its centre. They take pride in their 440-ewe commercial enterprise, run successfully alongside small pedigree flocks to provide varied market opportunities.

The farm's 175 acres (70ha) provide permanent pasture, complemented by a further 68 acres (27ha) of lower-lying river ground 10 miles away. The river ground is let out for summer grazing but then taken back for over-wintering to give the home farm a rest period until mid-April, by which time stock has returned home for lambing.

Family farm

Orseddwen has been in Clive's family for four generations with Clive moving back in 2016. Helen joined Clive at the farm before they married in 2018, saying it 'instantly felt like home'.

The couple's commercial enterprise consists of 440 Welsh Mules, a breed that has proven itself suitable for the farm, crossed mostly with Texel and Beltex rams to produce quality finished lambs. "We can be exposed to the extremes of weather here but the Welsh Mules are hardy enough to cope with this," comments Clive, explaining the farms sits at 1,350ft (410m) at its highest point.

The system is run traditionally with permanent grazing just having lime and fertiliser added. "Like much of the country, grass was in short supply this summer, but frequent moving of groups has allowed it to return well and ewes are now in good condition ready for the tups," says Clive, adding that while lambs took longer to finish the same quality has still been achieved.

Helen says: "When the final few lambs have finished, we will have sold 700 lambs averaging

45kg. We are very happy considering this year's challenges and we've been pleased by the prices we have achieved.

"We do creep feed and that cost has gone up but, factoring in the more difficult conditions and slightly increased lamb price, we can't complain."

Both Helen and Clive are committed supporters of their local livestock markets, selling all lambs liveweight through Oswestry and Welshpool.

"Markets are an important way of bringing the farming community together," comments Helen. They also enjoy an annual trip to Kelso ram sale to buy in new bloodlines.

Helen and Clive are members of the HCC Stock+ programme, which has enhanced their strong relationship with the local vet practice. Stock is routinely vaccinated against clostridial disease, enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis. And small issues with bought-in lameness and orf have been significantly reduced.

Buying risks

Aware of the risks associated with bringing in stock, the couple are vigilant to the threat of hidden disease. "Iceberg diseases are undoubtedly on the rise," comments Helen.

As a precautionary measure, and to aid pedigree sales, the farm's small flocks of Beltex, Bluefaced Leicester and Charmoise recently became maedi visna (MV) accredited.

"We did consider doing the whole commercial flock but it's currently unaffordable," Helen adds.

Helen's late mother had a soft spot for Bluefaced Leicesters and this family history has won the breed a place in Helen's heart. Her small flock was restarted when Clive purchased six ewes as a wedding gift. Since then Helen has enjoyed rediscovering the 'quirks' of the breed.

"They are family orientated, often isolating themselves from the other breeds," she says. "They also know when the weather changes as they are always the first to let us know they are ready to come in."

Pedigree flocks

Clive enjoys the Beltex flock and its influence on the finished lamb carcass, but also the often underrated traits of the Charmoise Hill breed.

"We really keep them to use the rams on our hogs for ease of lambing – but their growth is excellent. One of our customers saw a 2kg increase in carcass weight and an increase in grade at the abattoir. Performance like that on upland ground is impressive," Clive comments.

The couple haven't found enough demand from customers for performance recording figures to warrant going down this path, but say the MV accreditation has helped with sales of tups this season, including a memorable sale of a much-loved Bluefaced Leicester tup of Helen's, called Logie. "It was a once in a lifetime sale," she comments.

While enjoying the benefits of selling to other pedigree flocks, Helen and Clive are happy with the many repeat buyers they find for their Beltex rams sold as crossing tups at Welshpool Market.

Breeding stock is sold equally through private farm sales and markets. The couple's enthusiasm for showing supports this.

"I was brought up showing sheep and we enjoy the social side of it – but it's also your shop window," says Helen, adding this summer was another successful year for her and Clive, and also for her father.

Health focus

Looking to the future, she and Clive expect sheep numbers to remain fairly static and for the focus on health to increase. Clive comments: "You can sell a commercial lamb every day of the week but you only sell a pedigree animal when the right person comes along."

Helen comments: "I think focus is needed on improving existing animal health. I'm not interested in going into embryo transfer or AI on the pedigrees, as that runs the risk of reducing the gene pool of existing breeds. That could do more harm than good if existing health issues are not being rectified."

She continues: "Perhaps we are old fashioned but we like the traditional ways of breeding animals, looking forward to seeing what different progeny will be produced each lambing time – it all adds to the excitement. The pedigree flocks are synchronised for ease of management with no further interventions."

Helen is well placed to keep up with the latest breeding information, as well as relevant policy and technical information, through her roles with NSA. These have grown since she saw an advert



As well as showing her own sheep, Helen is a regular judge in the showing.

"I was brought up showing sheep and we enjoy the social side of it – but it's also your shop window."

Helen Roberts

18 years ago for a Welsh Regional Development Officer, meaning Helen is integral to work at NSA Head Office and NSA Cymru/Wales Region.

Her work with NSA and the wider industry was celebrated with the 2021 NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep industry.

She comments: "The UK sheep industry and NSA is really one big family with an integral part to play in the wider social and economic stability of the UK's rural communities. When I won the George Hedley I felt, without the support of the industry, I would not have achieved that or the other accolades I feel honoured to have been given."



The commercial flock of Welsh Mules has proven itself suitable for the farm.

Farm facts

- 440-ewe commercial flock of Welsh Mules run across 175 acres (70ha).
- Pedigree flocks of Beltex, Bluefaced Leicesters and Charmoise achieve success in both the show and sale ring.
- Sheep enterprise complemented by buying in store cattle to finish and sell deadweight to ABP Ellesmere.
- Markets are a key source for buying in new bloodlines.

Longer term tenancies are needed to enable environmental gains on farm.

Review of farm tenancies highlights need for long-term thinking



The Tenant Farmers Association (TFA) is urging the new ministerial team at Defra to give close attention to the Rock Review, commissioned by George Eustice and published during the political turmoil of this October.

The report is the result of work by the Defra Tenancy Working Group, chaired by Baroness Kate Rock – and TFA says it lends weight to issues of short-termism that it has been highlighting for many years.

“Take sheep farming as an example,” says TFA Chief Executive George Dunn. “It has always provided one of the most accessible routes into agriculture for those seeking to be farmers in their own account.

“The relatively low amount of capital required, coupled with access to grazing licences or various forms of shared grazing systems, have assisted many new entrants into the industry. The limiting factor is the paucity of opportunity for progression beyond these points of entry.

“Many new entrants quickly find their business aspirations are constrained by the lack of security they enjoy and the limited amount of opportunity available to progress into larger and longer-term farm tenancies.”

Restrictions

Mr Dunn says short-term interests in land are also severely restricting of the ability for land managers to properly invest in and take account of wider environmental considerations – an area where sheep farming provides many of the answers in respect of managing carbon, assisting the recovery of biodiversity and managing sensitive landscapes.

“Environmentally focused actions on farm, funded privately by the farm business or through access to Government and private sector schemes, normally require a long-term commitment from the land manager,” Mr Dunn says.

“Not only is the average length on new Farm Business Tenancies (FBTs) in England and Wales only a tad over three years, but almost 90% of all new FBTs are let for five years or less. As we are losing more and more of the land let under secure Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 tenancies,



the tenanted sector of agriculture is becoming characterised by a culture of short termism. This is being perpetuated by landlords’ agents who appear determined to maintain a tight rein that allows them to exert maximum control and leverage.

“This is not providing a sensible framework for farm business development, driving productivity or producing the public goods being demanded by society. Arguably, in addition, short-term tenancies are not necessarily benefiting landowners concerned about achieving long-term, sustainable returns and the sound management of their assets.

Long before the Rock Review, TFA repeatedly advocated for policies that encourage landlords to take a longer-term approach to the way they offer land to let under FBTs. One of the organisation’s main ideas has been to encourage the Treasury to restrict the availability of Agricultural Property Relief from Inheritance Tax on let land only to situations where the land is being let for a period of at least 10 years.

At the same time, TFA argues those landlords should have the ability to lock in their capital taxation position from day one of the lease to prevent them from being adversely affected by any subsequent changes made by existing or future Chancellors of the Exchequer.

Rock Review

Mr Dunn says: “The Rock Review is helpful in highlighting the need for more longer term thinking and a greater collaborative approach between landlords and tenants. It found that, while there is a huge amount of benefit to landlords and tenants, collaborative long-term agreements are the exception to the rule.

“It also highlights a host of easy to implement, quick wins that will make a major difference to resilience, productivity and the achievement of a raft of public goods. The report challenges the taxation framework and highlights the need for Government support to assist the tenanted sector.”

The Rock Review covers the tenants sector in England, so TFA is also carefully watching the Welsh Government’s review of the tenanted sector of agriculture as part of its development of the new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS).

“Hopefully the review in Wales can be encouraged to see things more widely than just through the lens of SFS. I also hope we can have some joined up thinking on both sides of the England/Wales border.”

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Lamb trade needs coordination to overcome current barriers

Both the domestic and export lamb trade is being affected by a 'huge disconnect' within the UK Government, according to Nick Allen of the British Meat Processors Association.

"Despite the increase in ease and frequency of communication with the advent of remote working, a huge disconnect has developed across government departments," Mr Allen says. "Indeed, this lack of integration often extends to groups within the same department.

"In seeking to guide and shape policymaking and represent the interests of our members BMPA engages with civil servants, MPs and committees across multiple departments. But I find it's often the case that two, three and sometimes four groups are working on the same thing, but with little or no knowledge of what the others are doing. We're increasingly finding that it's trade associations like BMPA and NSA that provide the conduit and thread of continuity between government teams and departments."

Conflicting agendas

Mr Allen goes as far as to say different ministries have conflicting agendas, with one department's priority being undermined by another's actions, with both sides pulling in different directions.

He says: "A good example is the issue of food security. Defra consistently tells us industry must gear-up to maintain the production of affordable food to shore up UK food security. But at the same time, the Home Office is busy creating what I consider to be a bureaucratic and expensive

immigration system that seems to actively prevent us from getting access to the labour we need. They're working at cross purposes, but British producers are suffering, and British consumers are paying the price."

When it comes to exports, Mr Allen highlights the reliance of the meat industry on the ability to export parts of the animal for which no market exists in the UK – to achieve profitability from each carcass.



Exports enable all parts of a carcass to be profitable.

"In the current economic climate and particularly in the sheep sector, exports are even more important," he says, adding that while newly established access to the US market for lamb is welcome, it will generally be for small volumes of high-end product into the food service industry, which is already well catered for by the likes of New Zealand and Australia.

"The unavoidable fact is that Europe is still and will remain the UK's biggest and most important export market," Mr Allen says.

"A major concern is the new requirement for veterinary visits to farms and the need for vet-to-vet attestation for EU exports. Farmers, government and industry need to collaborate to

develop a sensible system that does not create further paperwork headaches. A simple and accessible method for recording these visits will reassure vets signing export health certificates the visits have taken place.

"Regardless of how much meat is sold on the UK market, if firms are unable to export items such as skins, hides and offal, the drop in revenue will have to be recovered either by lowering the price paid for animals at the farm gate or raising the price of the meat destined for British supermarket shelves. Neither scenario is good, but both are avoidable"

Systems review

BMPA suggests a need to review the systems being run, to remove the disconnection, cross-purposes and unnecessary bureaucracy being created, looking instead to models used overseas.

"There is opportunity to learn valuable lessons from competitors like the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand, where different systems work in alignment, benefiting businesses and enabling cooperation," Mr Allen says.

"Government departments, levy bodies and assurance schemes have a key role in protecting our standards and boosting exports, but they need to work together and develop joint workstreams that benefit taxpayers and the businesses that fund them.

"Learning from our competitors and increasing cooperation between regulators, government and the industry will foster a thriving and buoyant British agriculture and food sector. When the dust settles on this latest round of government turmoil, it's this kind of creative collaboration BMPA will be pushing for," he concludes.



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Farm theft can also affect mental health as well as finances.

Protecting your physical assets in the gathering storm



The impact of inflation means it is more important than ever to focus on careful management of aspects of your business that can be controlled, according to Rebecca Davidson of NFU Mutual.

"As inflation storms in, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake, whether you are planning to hunker down and let the storm pass, or boldly seek new opportunities in fast-changing market conditions, protecting your assets is more important than ever.

"Key to riding the storm is keeping in close contact with your insurer to ensure your cover is sufficient as prices for machinery, diesel, fertiliser and feed spiral upwards. For example, prices of new and second-hand tractors are rising rapidly, making regular review of the sums insured on your tractor insurance vital, to avoid being out of pocket in the event of a claim," says Ms Davidson.

Rural crime

NFU Mutual is concerned the cost-of-living crisis could trigger further increases in rural crime. While rural crime figures fell during the two years of covid restrictions, a recent poll reveals 89% of respondents think rising inflation could result in a rise in countryside crime – and past experience of previous economic downturns agrees.

"With darker winter nights enabling criminals to get on to farms unseen, it's prudent to look carefully at your farm's security measures and upgrade any gaps," Ms Davidson continues.

Largely due to their isolation, with few people around, sheep farms are targeted by criminals

hunting for quad bikes, diesel and, increasingly, pick-up trucks. NFU Mutual claims for thefts reveal farm vehicles are the top rural theft target. This year, trailers are also being stolen in unprecedented numbers.

Increased prices of diesel, heating oil, fertiliser and animal feed are also making sheep farms attractive targets for criminals.

Ms Davidson says: "In recent months, large-scale fuel theft is plaguing farms with reports of 'tank raiders' stealing more than 1,000l at a time."

Increased threat

High food prices also increase the threat of livestock rustling, making it vital for stock markings to be clear and flocks regularly checked through winter months. Regular checks can also help monitor dogs running loose, which is increasingly necessary as dog attacks on sheep continue to rise.

NFU Mutual claim figures estimate farm animals worth £1.52m were killed or injured by out-of-control dogs in 2021.

Strong security measures deter thieves but need regularly updating to remain effective, as criminals are adept at finding ways to defeat them. NFU Mutual recommends looking at your farm from the perspective of a would-be thief and taking action to put new measures in place if you spot weaknesses.

Ms Davidson comments: "From our close links with farmers, we know rural crime is about far more than the financial impact. It causes anxiety, frustration and inconvenience - particularly when thieves strike repeatedly. Being in touch with others facing the same challenges, either through farm watch groups or local WhatsApp networks, can be a real help.



"Finally, whatever route you take to weather the cost-of-living crisis, don't compromise on safety. Skimping on maintenance and taking cuts puts lives at risk and often ends up costing more in the long run, due to delays and extra repairs."



Farm vehicles are the top rural theft target.

Working with the next generation

As part of NFU Mutual funding for schemes tackling rural crime, it is supporting a new training initiative enabling Cumbrian young farmers to fight rural crime.

The Partners in Preventing Farm Crime project trains young farmers to identify farm rural crime risks and put in place practical security actions to stop people becoming victims of crime.

The initiative, launched last June, is supported by Crimestoppers and Cumbria Police, and involves YFC members helping local farmers to improve security in their fields and farmyards.

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Further information is available from the SPC, Datasheet or package leaflet. MSD Animal Health UK Limited. Registered office: Walton Manor, Walton, Milton Keynes MK7 7AJ, UK. Registered in England & Wales no. 946942. Advice should be sought from the medicine prescriber.

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Proposed changes could have a big impact on self-assessment tax.

Removing the confusion around basis period reform for sheep farmers

By Catherine Britton, Scrutton Bland

Many sheep farmers operating as sole traders and in partnerships will be impacted by the proposed 'basis period reform' as part of the government's plans for making tax digital for income tax self-assessment.

With this reform deferred until the 2023/24 tax year, there is still time to consider your position if your year-end is not concurrent with the tax year, allowing you to take steps to minimise the impact of the new measures.

Currently, self-employed individuals and members of partnerships are charged income

tax on profits arising in the accounting period that ends in a tax year. So, for a business with a June accounting year end, the tax liability for the 2022/23 tax year will be those arising in the year ended 30th June 2022. This is known as the 'accounting year basis'.

However, these rules can be complex, especially in the opening years of a business. It can also lead to a time-lag between profits being earned and when tax is due. In the example on the facing page, tax would not be due on the profits for the period from 1st July 2021 to 30th June 2022 until 31st January 2024.

Profit taxation

The new reform changes the taxation of profits to a 'tax year basis' with effect from the tax year 2024/25, so a business's profit or loss for a tax year is the profit or loss arising in the tax year itself, regardless of the business's accounting date. The transition year from the current accounting year basis to the new tax year basis will be 2023/24. During the transition year, many businesses will experience double taxation because they will be taxed not only on 12 months' worth of profits from the end of the previous 2022/23 basis period, but there will also be additional transitional profit to bring the figures in line with the tax year.

Farmers and their advisers already have to factor averaging and the hobby farming rules into

tax planning. The changes to the basis period reform will add a further layer of complexity, especially if businesses are also involved in diversification projects. While any transitional profits will be ignored for averaging calculations, some farming businesses could still find themselves tipped into a higher tax bracket because of the accelerated profits.

Overlap profits

In the example provided, any overlap profits from the early years of the business can be used to reduce the taxable profit in the transition year. Your farm accountant will therefore need to identify available overlap profits sooner rather than later. However, for the many family farming businesses set up before the advent of self-assessment in 1996, locating the necessary paperwork to determine the correct overlap position may not be straightforward.

Take advice, sooner rather than later, to forecast any additional tax liabilities that might arise because of the proposed reforms and consider whether it would be advantageous for you to change your tax year. A good adviser can suggest planning opportunities that may lower the amount of tax due through, for example, the timing of plant and machinery acquisitions, and also assist if you are considering incorporating your business.

Effect of the tax change

As an example, let's look at a partner who has an annual profit share of £80,000 and the partnership accounts are drawn up to 30th June. The overlap profits brought forward are £10,000. The taxable profits in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 tax years would be as shown below.

2022/23		2023/24	
Profit to year end 30th June 2022	£80,000	Profit to year end 30th June 2023	£80,000
		Period from 1st July 2023-5th April 2023	£60,000
		Overlap profit	-£10,000
		Total taxable profits	£130,000

This is likely to present huge challenges to cash flow and a corresponding reduction in the cash available for drawings. To assist with this, the 'excess profits' in the transition year (£50,000 in this example) can be spread across five years, meaning tax is paid on an extra £10k profits each year from 2023/24 to 2027/28 inclusive.

Adjusting your year end

This change to the tax system is prompting some sole traders and partnerships to consider moving their accountancy year to match the tax year. The pros and cons of this need considering.

- If you decide to adjust your year-end ahead of the reform, careful consideration should be given to the potential impact on averaging calculations.
- With regards to the hobby farming rules, which historically have stated a profit must be made every six years, these have to be calculated in accordance with the tax year. Moving to a coterminous year end will therefore make it much simpler for farm accountants to ensure they do not fall foul of the loss restriction rules.
- There may be accounting issues in aligning your accounting period to the tax year (for example stock valuations).
- The opportunity for post year-end tax planning is made more difficult with a coterminous year end. In the panel example, where accounts are drawn up to 30th June, the partners then have until the following 5th April to decide how much they should put into their pension. This nine-month planning window would disappear with a 5th April year end.
- It could, however, cause complications if your current year end is retained. The complexities of changing to a tax year end might simply be replaced with different (and potentially greater) complexities of having to apportion profits and arrive at estimates for tax returns.
- If you are planning any large equipment purchases, an extended trading period may not result in much additional tax. In this case, there would be an argument for changing the year end ahead of the proposed reforms, particularly with the £1m annual investment allowance now available until 31st March 2023.

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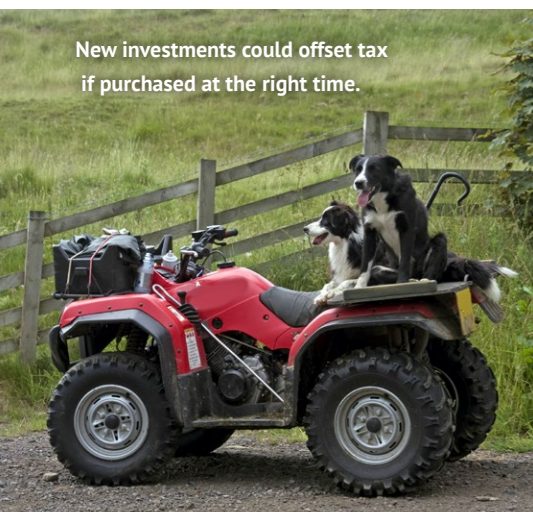
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Responsible medicines use underpins sustainable sheep farming.

One health: a concept for humans, animals and the environment

By Fiona Hutchins, Elanco



Sustainability is a word we hear many times a day but it's difficult to understand what it means in practice.

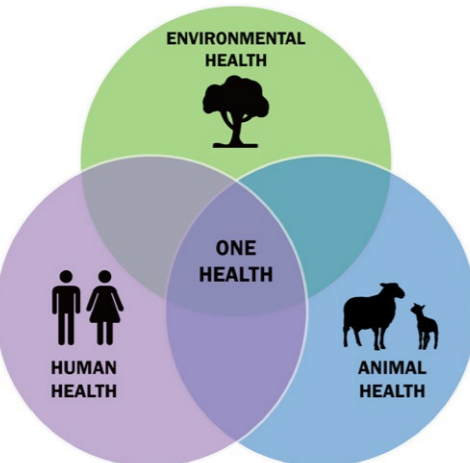
I think the concept of 'one health' helps to define sustainability on livestock farms.

One health is an integrated, unified approach that aims to balance and optimise the health of people, animals and ecosystems sustainably. It allows for a balanced discussion of complex issues because it recognises that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants, and the wider environment (including ecosystems) are closely linked and inter-dependent.

One health

For me, the key point of one health is that animal, human and environmental health are intertwined and we need to find the sweet spot when all groups' needs are met. This can be difficult to achieve, especially if one of the groups (animal, human or environment) believe their cause is the worthiest. There needs to be a balanced, pragmatic discussion based on facts if we want to achieve the ultimate goals.

When it comes to how animal medicines fit into the concept of one health, antibiotics are the key topic – because it is their use in animals that has been most challenged with regards to human health.



Animal, human and environmental health are intertwined through one health.

The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance has done a great job working with farmers, vets, other prescribers and government to ensure we are using antibiotics responsibly (see panel overleaf).

Another element of the one health agenda is the effect of animal medicines on the environment. As the spotlight on sustainability increase, valid questions are being asked about what happens to a medicine once it has been applied to an animal.

Medicine regulation

Animal medicines in the UK are highly regulated by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and must satisfy three main criteria to get a licence.

- **Safety.** Is it safe to the animal? Is it safe to the person applying it? Is it safe for the environment?
- **Efficacy.** Does it do what it claims to do? For example, kill parasites and, if so, which ones?
- **Quality.** Is the product produced in a registered manufacturing plant and does it meet the same set of standards every time?

When it comes to the environment, it is important to know that, since 2005, all products must undertake an Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) to identify potential environmental hazards and risks, determine the need for specific risk minimisation measures where appropriate, and ensure appropriate labelling is in place for users and healthcare professionals.

The ERA looks at what happens to the medicines once it is applied. What is washed off,

Continued overleaf.

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▶ what is excreted in dung or urine and then what impact that would have on non-target species in the environment, such as dung beetles.

If the risk from a product is determined to be too high, the product will not receive a licence for sale. Environmental safety assessment does not end when the product goes to market. Effects continue to be monitored and, in the unusual event of new data demonstrating environmental damage occurring, the product can be withdrawn. While there are no recent examples of this, it has happened historically – hence the reason synthetic pyrethroids dips are no longer used.



Annual health reviews using a vet or adviser will aid responsible use of medicines.

Environmental safety

Once an ERA has examined the environmental safety of a product, a legal document is produced explaining what that animal medicine is for, how much to give, timings, meat and milk withdrawal times etc. This Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) is mandatory for every product licensed for sale in the UK.

The SPC has an environmental section detailing any precautions to observe when using the product. The information from the SPC will be on the product label and available on the VMD website.

While it is reassuring to know animal medicines undergo a thorough environmental licencing process, the instructions still have to be followed and products used and disposed of correctly. Most unused products should not be discarded into

waterways, as it could be dangerous for fish and other aquatic organisms.

Animal medicines have been a real force for good in farming and have allowed the successful treatment of conditions that in the past have caused great distress and loss to animals and humans. The use of medicines is only part of keeping healthy animals and, from a sustainability, economic and basic common-sense point of view, should only be when needed, according to the label and disposed of correctly.

Treatment plans

Climate unpredictability and advances in our knowledge of parasites and disease means we need to base the use of medicines on an individual farms basis. Treatment plans based

on the time of year may be easy to do but they often mean products are used at the wrong time or unnecessarily. Working with a vet or adviser to understand the needs of your farm should be a huge benefit, not a cost to the business.

Additionally, there are lots of free resources and advice available to help farmers manage disease on their farm, maximising health, welfare and productivity. The SCOPS website is a great example of one of them.

One Health is not an endpoint but a way for all interested parties to discuss complex issues and ensure the health of animals, humans and the environment now and in the future.

Find ERA and SPC details for all products at www.vmd.defra.gov.uk.

Medicine use targets for the sheep sector

The concept of One Health is central to work by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance, of which NSA is a stakeholder.

NSA is involved in a collaborative awareness campaign with RUMA to profile the work of the sheep sector on its responsible use of medicines, highlighting the importance and positive impact of initiatives such as Farm Vet Champions (FVC), the Medicine Hub and other actions stemming from the RUMA target taskforce.

Following the withdrawal of oral antibiotic for watery mouth in lambs, which came as a blow to many producers ahead of the 2022 lambing season, RUMA and its members liaised with vets to ensure producers had information about husbandry practices to reduce the risk and could seek appropriate alternatives, but only when needed. Oral antibiotics at lambing time were a key area of use for the sheep sector so the withdrawal will have made an impression on overall usage figures.

The recent RUMA target taskforce report shows an increase in vaccine use, suggesting the sector is moving more towards a preventative approach for conditions such as footrot, abortions and clostridial diseases.

More support for vets, farmers and advisers was seen with the launch of the livestock vaccination guidelines by NOAH, aiming to help improve the health and welfare of UK sheep sector, support farm resilience and sustainable improvements in productivity. Unfortunately, vaccine use may have been hampered by supply shortages for several vaccines during the 2022 season.



Increased training in vets, promoting the value of FVC and adopting greater health planning has been actioned by the Sheep Veterinary Society (SVS) through Flock Health Club professional development courses.

FVC networks have been established with 130 vets enrolled for sheep training. To further emphasise the importance of encouraging sheep vet farmer engagement with a focus on health planning, SVS conferences in 2023 will aim to flag this as a discussion topic.

NSA is pleased to see the impacts of the global pandemic, Brexit, rising production costs, ongoing labour shortages, ongoing trade negotiations, supply chain issues and the cost-of-living crisis, have not hampered the sheep sectors ambitions for, and benefits from, reducing antibiotic usage.

[More information on Medicine Hub overleaf.](#)



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Industry-owned Medicine Hub is open for farmers and vets to upload data

After a great deal of time debating its potential benefits and finding a practical way to deliver it, the Medicine Hub is now up and running for farmed livestock.

Developed by AHDB at the request of industry, the hub centrally records data on antibiotic use for each sector, to prove the UK is the fifth lowest user of antibiotics in the food-producing animals in Europe.

It will report aggregated, anonymised data to provide a sector-specific picture – but the data uploaded always belongs to the producer it came from, with only them and their vet practice able to look at in detail. Individual data is only shared further if specific permission is given.

Users can generate reports to illustrate which antibiotics have been used on-farm, why and when and, always keeping data anonymous, compare usage to similar farms. This will open up the possibility of farmer-vet discussions around antibiotic use.

Early adopters

Bryan and Liz Griffiths, longstanding NSA members farming at Burrington, North Devon, are early adopters of the new system.

Bryan says: "The UK sheep industry finds itself in a time of uncertainty with worries over future trade, changes to agricultural and environmental policy and, when it comes to antibiotics, not being able to robustly evidence its claims of being a low user.

"That's why we believe the Medicine Hub is a much-needed tool for the sheep sector and

hope to see data now being uploaded, in volume, onto the system.

"Producers in the UK adhere to some of the most rigorous and robust production standards and work hard to achieve high levels of health and welfare as well as responsible antibiotic use. But until now, there has been no central resource for building a picture of antibiotic use at a national level."

The Medicine Hub gathers antibiotic use data from sheep and cattle enterprises from across the UK. AHDB says, with increasing farmer awareness, stronger signals from the supply chain and the rollout of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway in England, interest in uploading and sharing data is starting to gather pace.

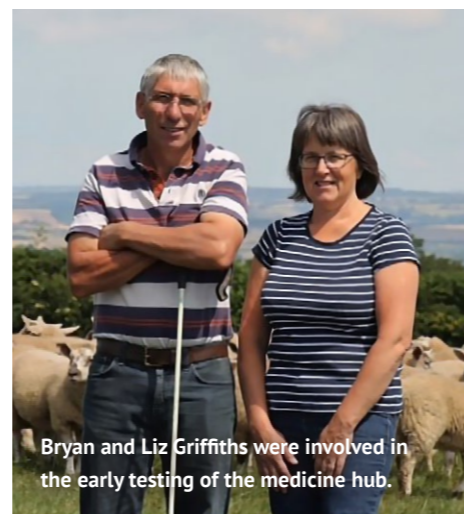
Vet input

"We have always had a close relationship with our vet and that really matters, as this isn't just about farmers working in isolation when it comes to using the hub," says Liz.

"You can work with your vet to input data, with them either supplying the numbers needed or playing a part in uploading it. For this year we have entered data onto the Medicine Hub ourselves but in the future, as the system develops, we will give permission for our vet to upload our antibiotic data direct from dispensing records.

"Our understanding is that, in the future, the hub will be able to accept data from farmers, direct from vets or from farm software at the press of a button, subject to essential permissions."

Bryan and Liz work hard to ensure a high health status in their flock, stringent biosecurity procedures and best practice management throughout the year, particularly at lambing time,



Bryan and Liz Griffiths were involved in the early testing of the medicine hub.

to reduce disease and antibiotic use throughout the system.

"Of course we do get some disease. Who doesn't? And we treat as and when needed," Bryan explains. "Like many producers, our main issues are around lameness, especially CODD, and occasional pink eye, but we adhere to the principle of 'as much necessary as little as possible.'"

Liz says: "We registered for the Medicine Hub, collated our annual antibiotic use, inputted the data – bottles purchased and livestock numbers – and then it was all relatively straightforward."

"This simple level of crude data and ongoing development of the Medicine Hub will aid the defence of the livestock sector's reputation and help protect antibiotics for human use in the future," adds Bryan.

The hub is focused on antibiotics, which NSA supports. It has the potential to be widened to other medicines if there is desire from industry to record this centrally.

Gathering antibiotic data will help defend the reputation of the sheep sector.

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Blood samples are one way to investigate a poor scanning or abortion.

Top tips on how to deal with a poor scanning percentage

By Laura Sage, Damory Veterinary Clinic **vetPartners**

Taking steps to understand the reasons behind a poor scanning percentage can help prevent it happening again in the future and ensure optimal productivity from your flock.

Dealing with a poor scanning percentage requires a two-pronged approach – identifying what has gone wrong, then taking steps to prevent it occurring again.

Firstly, you need to identify whether your poor scanning percentage is because you have lots of ewes that are pregnant but carrying fewer lambs than expected - more singles than twins, for example – or whether you've got lots of empty ewes.

This is different for each farm as it depends on the breed of sheep and/or the system used. A good scanning percentage for a lowland farm might be 180-200%, but for a hill flock around 120%.

Discussion groups

A good way of understanding your scanning percentage is to join a local flock discussion group or flock health club. Despite differences on individual farms, benchmarking will really help you understand how your flock is performing compared to other flocks in similar systems.

Losses can also occur after scanning. Reabsorption (ewes scanned in-lamb that later deliver fewer or no lambs) and abortion (pre-term dead lambs delivered in mid-late pregnancy) can often point towards infectious causes.

Once you get an abortion rate of 3% or more you should be investigating the cause. But if you have a poor scanning percentage it's worth

investigating any abortions fully. Likewise, if your barren rate exceeds 2-3% you should start investigating why this is occurring.

A practical first step to identifying what's gone wrong is to take a blood sample from six barren ewes in each lambing group and check them for toxoplasmosis, enzootic abortion and, possibly, trace elements. If they are vaccinated for toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion, these blood tests will be unreliable so a different approach might be needed.

The key trace elements to look for in blood tests include iodine and selenium. If the tests flag up any problems with these, it's also worth doing some forage and soil analysis. You can then look to bolus ewes against these trace element problems in the future.

Investigating abortion

Meanwhile, the best way to get a diagnosis for the cause of an abortion is to submit an aborted lamb and as much of the placenta as you can for testing. Often only a small sample of the placenta is sent for investigation, but more is better for this type of testing.

A variety of causes are tested for, including toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion, but also salmonella and campylobacter. This is the most cost-effective way of getting a diagnosis for the cause of the abortion, as blood testing can only pick up a limited number of causes.

In all instances, if a sheep is currently aborting, or has aborted, she should be isolated from the pregnant flock until you know what caused her abortion.

You must also always remember to wear gloves when removing aborted material away from sheep. Enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis are both zoonotic, and women of child-bearing age must be especially careful to avoid contracting these diseases.

Another cause for poor scanning percentages might be your rams, either due to a problem making males sub-fertile or not using enough rams for the number of ewes in the flock.

Carrying out checks on tups ahead of tupping season is recommended, checking their teeth, toes and testicles. Professionals are available to do this for you and can also conduct ram semen analysis.

The same goes for ewes. Make sure they are all in the right condition without any major health issues before tupping. You'd be surprised the impact lameness, for example, can have on fertility.

Prevention steps

The best strategy for preventing future problems with your scanning percentage will depend on the root cause. Pinpoint the timing of the problem and identify your farm's specific risk factors.

If you discover an infectious disease, such as toxoplasmosis or enzootic abortion is the cause, culling barren ewes isn't always the answer.

For example, if toxoplasmosis has been identified as the cause, it isn't something that is spread ewe-to-ewe and once a sheep has had it, she is immune to the disease. However, enzootic abortion does spread from one ewe to another and, depending on when the sheep is infected, she can go on and shed it the following year. Because it is contagious between sheep, you should also be aware of the enzootic abortion risk from buying in stock.

Consider the role of vaccinations. Vaccines are available for both toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion, and there is a vaccine to deal with campylobacter that vets can import.

For trace element problems, sheep can be bolused and, if a nutritional problem is identified as the cause of the lower scanning percentage, diet can be changed.

Finally, pay extra attention to the ewes that are pregnant to minimise impact on profitability. Focus on ewe nutrition, good supervision around lambing and good colostrum management, to make the most of the lambs you do have.



Poor scanning percentage can be due to a variety of causes.

What is causing losses?

Many of the causes for empty ewes are the same causes for ewes carrying lots of singles. These include:

- Nutritional problems and incorrect ewe body condition at tupping time.
- Sub-fertile rams.
- Infectious diseases such as toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion.
- Trace element deficiencies.

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Balancing minerals during pregnancy to boost lambing success

Paying closer attention to mineral nutrition is essential for ewes, especially in the latter stages of pregnancy and immediately post lambing, according to Isabelle England of Trouw Nutrition.

“The foundations of profitable lamb production are established in late pregnancy and immediately post lambing. Feeding at this time influences ewe health and milk production, lamb survival, lamb thrift and growth rates,” she says.

With grass continuing to grow reasonably well into the winter months across much of the UK, sheep producers may be looking to exploit grass growth and trim back supplementary feeds. Ms England emphasises that diets based on forage alone can be deficient in essential minerals, therefore mineral supplementation may be required to allow ewes to perform to full potential. This can come in a variety of forms, from free access minerals to mineral premixes included in compound feed.

“A responsible mineral strategy ensuring macro and trace mineral requirements are met but not exceeded can help in boosting ewe and lamb immunity, fertility and performance,” she continues.

When it comes to deficiency, ewes may be deficient without showing significant outward signs, Ms England explains. The consequences can



Mineral supplementation is one method to balance diet deficiencies.

be lighter lambs, lower milk yield, reduced milk quality and more problem lambings.

“Signs of deficiencies in lambs will include poorer early vigour, reduced lamb survival and lower growth rates. Selenium, cobalt, iodine and zinc are particularly important,” she highlights.

Selenium

A shortage of selenium can lead to poor immunity and embryonic losses, and can be critical for lambs at birth for reducing the risk of hypothermia. Iodine is an important component of the hormone thyroxine, which controls energy metabolism and is essential for foetal growth and development.

Cobalt deficiency leads to impaired immune function and is essential for vitamin B12 production, important for energy metabolism in ruminants. Sheep have no capacity to store cobalt or iodine so it must be continuously supplied.

Zinc has a specific role in supporting hoof integrity, alongside maintaining dry matter intakes throughout pregnancy and immediately after lambing.

Manganese deficiency is linked to poor development of the lamb skeletons and poor reproductive performance.

Ms England says: “A diet consisting of forage alone may not meet all mineral requirements so mineral supplementation is an important consideration for productive ewes.

“The challenge when delivering responsible mineral nutrition is to balance the variation in mineral intakes according to the ewe’s nutritional status, taking into consideration the differences in diet and concentrate feed levels in late pregnancy versus early lactation.”

Mineral source

A key factor in ensuring effective mineral supply is the source of minerals fed, Ms England says, as minerals are only of value to the animal when they are absorbed into the bloodstream.

She says to pay attention to bioavailability, which refers to how much mineral is absorbed. As this is much lower when minerals fed are from inorganic sources, Ms England recommends looking for mineral supplements that contain minerals from bioavailable sources where possible.

“Investigating mineral levels and their sources can have a significant impact on ewe productivity and lamb performance,” she concludes.

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Tuesday 16th May – Newtown, Powys

NSA North Sheep
Wednesday 7th June – Ponteland, Northumberland

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland
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Empty ewes can be a sign of underlying disease.

Research demonstrates disease control can support better productivity

Investigation into the key drivers for improved sheep fertility by HCC has found tackling preventable disease in productive ewes plays a significant role in improving farm efficiency and potential profitability.

Farms participating in the HCC project were assessed through background information and data regarding flock numbers, previous lambing percentages and information on animal health practices. A number of faecal samples were also collected and, for some flocks, further sampling of empty ewes and analysis of scanned data.

Two of the diseases found to play a pivotal role in ewes scanning empty on the selected farms were Johnes disease and toxoplasmosis.

Ewe age and BCS were also found to be associated with fertility, which are also factors

affecting Johnes – a disease that typically presents in older ewes that are losing weight.

HCC says the work has created a unique set of data looking at the age structure of flocks and the affects breeding females' longevity has on the economics of businesses.

Collaboration

John Richards of HCC comments: "We're proud to be working with Welsh farmers to collate data not previously collected from Welsh or UK sheep farmers.

"A lot of work has been carried out looking at the productive lives of dairy cattle across the UK, but this looks like a first for sheep. Technology is helping farmers collect data more efficiently and is feeding into research.

"Another interesting element is the significant variation between sheep fertility on farms and also within different lambing years for each farm,

with many of the businesses not experiencing the same fertility and fecundity issues every year.

"But it is clear BCS and ewe age are closely associated with some fertility issues. This shows the importance of improved disease control on farms and, with this in mind, farmers are encouraged to monitor BCS of ewes as we head into the lambing season.

"Best practice pre-lambing would be to BCS all ewes within the flock and group them accordingly. Specific management plans can then be delivered to fit the needs of the various groups to ensure all are best placed to have a successful lambing.

This work is part of HCC's Stoc+, one of three five-year projects in the Welsh Government and EU-funded Red Meat Development Programme.

More at www.meatpromotion.wales/en/industry-projects/red-meat-development-programme/flock-and-herd-health-project.



On-farm progress

Hywel Wigley of Llaunwchlyn, Gwynedd, is one of the participating farmers. He says: "This research has proved pivotal to my flock of Welsh Mountain ewes. Scanning results before my 2022 lambing showed some of the ewes were empty.

"This project allowed more research to be carried out on my farm and diagnose any issues within the flock. Working with my local vet, samples were taken, tests carried out and any problems identified and dealt with proactively."

Mr Wigley says the data collected was immediately useful to him and his vet, and other farmers involved in the project, but also have longer term and more generalised benefits to other sheep farmers.

"My flock has certainly been strengthened because of this project and I am pleased the evidence gathered will be shared widely with the industry to help others too," he says.



Hywel Wigley (right) with son Llywarch.

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Are worms on your radar as a current cause of ill thrift in lambs?

By Heather Stevenson, SRUC



While high worm burdens can cause obvious diarrhoea, smaller numbers are not easy to recognise and may be slipping under your radar.

Infected lambs grow poorly because their appetite is reduced. In addition, protein that would otherwise be used for growth is redirected to help develop an anti-worm immune response and repair worm damage to the digestive tract.

Treatment choice can be confusing with more than 50 different products on the market. Luckily, they all fall into just five different groups based on their active ingredient and the SCOPS Know Your Anthelmintics guide groups these together - making it much simpler for you.

The options are group 1-BZ (white) drenches, group 2-LV (yellow) drenches, group 3-ML (clear) drenches and injectables, group 4-AD (orange) drench or group 5-SI (purple) drench. You should be able to find this information on the outside of the box and/or container.

Which wormer

So which wormer group should you use? One that works is a good starting point. Once you know which groups are effective on your farm, other factors such as the time of year and animals to be treated can be used to help select a suitable product. Be sure to discuss this with your vet or adviser to ensure the appropriate product is selected.

White drenches have been around since the 1960s. Any worms that can survive treatment with these products are known as resistant. Repeated use of white drenches has allowed resistant worms to increase in number over many years. As a result, white products are no longer fully effective on large numbers of farms. This has been known for a long time - yet they remain the most heavily used wormer group.

Why is this? Not enough farmers check to find out if they are working properly. It is easier to carry on using a product you're familiar with and reach for some trace elements or blame the weather for poor lamb performance.

Ineffective use

The truth is that this problem is not going to go away, and ineffective wormers are probably already costing you money. Resistance is not confined to white products. Worms can be resistant to any of the wormer groups, and some are resistant to more than one.

You may be thinking you've heard all this before - but have you acted on it? If you have already tested to find out if white drenches are effective on your farm, then consider checking yellow and clear products.

This year, SRUC continued to find large worm burdens in replacement ewe hoggs and store lambs well into autumn. This suggests there is opportunity on many farms to carry out testing and find out if ineffective wormers are adding to the problem. It is in your interest these animals grow as well as possible.

An effective wormer treatment check

1. Contact your vet/advisor before you begin and discuss how to proceed.
2. Select a group of homebred hoggs that have been managed together. They should not have been wormed during the previous four weeks (longer if a clear product containing moxidectin was used).
3. Check your dosing gun is dispensing the correct amount of product. If weigh scales are available, check they are accurate and use them when animals are gathered..
4. Make sure the product is in date, has been stored correctly and is properly mixed before and during use.
5. Collect fresh faecal samples from a minimum of 10 animals. Mark these animals so they can be easily identified.
6. Weigh the animals, calculate the correct dose for each and administer this carefully. If weigh scales are not available dose for the heaviest in the group (provided there is not an excessive size range).
7. If the samples are in bags, remove the air before sealing. If you are using pots fill them as full as possible. Write the individual animal IDs on the bags/pots.
8. Take the samples to your vet/adviser/local laboratory for individual worm egg counts. If this is delayed keep the samples cool, for example at 4°C in your medicine fridge.
9. Collect faecal samples from the same individual animals one week later if you used a yellow product, or two weeks later if you used a white or group clear product. Repeat steps 7 and 8.

An effective wormer should reduce the worm egg count by at least 95%.

More information on worming treatment checks on the SCOPS website at www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/worms/worming-treatment-check.

Large worm burdens were being found by SRUC long after summer 2022.



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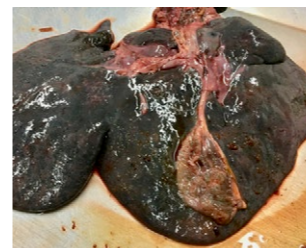
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- **Sheep scab.** Use the ELISA blood test to identify infestations early or avoid unnecessary treatments.

This SCOPS message is supported by NSA Find out about testing options at www.scops.org.uk



Careful management is needed to ensure ewe health.

Fodder beet could offer a cost-effective way to winter ewes

By Liz Genever, independent Sheep Consultant

Fodder beet is a popular choice for wintering systems because it can produce a large amount of feed from a small area and work really well for ewes.

Yields of 50-75t fresh weight per hectare (20-30tFW/acre) are possible and, with prices of around 4-6p/kgDM it can be a cheap alternative to wintering ewes. However, there are a few challenges to think about.

Site selection. Due to the stocking rate required to eat fodder beet, it is important to select a well-draining site with light to medium soils. If a site can be found, for example, with ewes allocated 2% of their bodyweight, it could carry 250 ewes averaging 70kg on one hectare for 60 days only if yielding 18tDM/ha, with silage or hay making up 25% of their intake.

It also means a high proportion of the farm can be rested. Ideally the ewes should be given

long breaks, maybe moving the fence every day or every other day over the desired number of rows. It may be worth drilling grass alongside the fodder beet to act as the run-back, plus a site for any bales being fed.

Variety selection. For grazing, varieties with lower dry matter (easier to eat) and high proportion of leaf (higher protein content) are ideal. They also need a growth habit where a lot of the bulb is above the surface, as this makes it easier for sheep to eat.

Ewe selection. Ewes should not be tupped on fodder beet but can be introduced onto it once the rams are taken out. Ideally, they should have some beet fed at grass before being transitioned onto the crops, or it can cause dietary upset.

Some systems manage ewes as one group until scanning, with body condition monitored to ensure ewes that don't cope can be removed. After scanning, the groups are split based on results, with the twins maintained on the crop,

the singles asked to work a bit harder (perhaps by clearing up after the twins) and triplets removed from the crop onto grass if possible.

Avoid grazing with lambs (around 12 months of age) that may be cutting more teeth, as they won't be able to eat the crop as well.

Fibre source. Ewes should have access to long fibre, such as hay, silage or straw, when on fodder beet – to maintain good rumen function. Ideally around 25% of their intake should be available from non-fodder beet sources. This could be run-back areas if grass is not spoilt.

Protein supplement. Fodder beet, especially if most of the leaves have gone, is low in protein. Feeding higher protein silages, such as red clover, can be used to adjust the diets.

Most systems aim to move ewes back to grass three to four weeks before lambing, giving them time to adjust their protein levels. However, if ewes are being fed for longer, closer to lambing time, they will need access to higher protein feeds and this still may not meet their demands.

Maintaining good health. Iodine is likely to be deficient in ewes grazing fodder beet, so a bolus will be needed. Being up to date on their clostridial vaccinations is important too, due to the higher risk of soil ingestion when grazing fodder beet.

Use in lactation. Feeding harvested fodder beet at grass once the ewes have lambed can help to balance the high level of protein in spring grass. A few kilos of fodder beet per ewe could be allocated per day.

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



Plenty of bulb above the ground makes for easier eating.

Lamb finishing: top tips for success

By Paul Mardell, Carrs Billington

If you're shouldering the cost of buying in feed this winter to finish lambs, here are some tips to help maximise your investment.

1. Introduce new feed programmes over several days to give the rumen time to adjust. This will ensure maximum feed digestion and minimise feed waste.
2. Ensure feeders are never empty to avoid overeating behaviours at times of refilling.
3. Regularly handle and weigh to assess weight and fat cover is returning feed inputs.
4. Offer a structural fibre source from either straw or hay fed ad-lib.
5. Ensure plenty of fresh, clean water troughs.
6. Ensure feed is formulated to give high energy with the correct balance of starch and NDF, and includes appropriate minerals.
7. Move feeders regularly and lime areas around the feeders to avoid lameness.
8. Check worm egg counts regularly. Any treatments or vaccinations should be carried out before any stress-inducing changes are made.
9. If housing, ensure an airy but draught-free environment with adequate lying space. Do not house wet lambs. Consider mineral/vitamin drenches where appropriate.
10. Depending on purchaser penalties, shear housed lambs to increase stocking density and reduce risk of heat stress.



Keeping feeders full can help avoid overeating behaviours.

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Fix myself or seek veterinary advice? Sheep triage options

By Davinia Hinde, Bainbridge Vets



We are all aware sheep get into many predicaments, but it's often challenging to know what can be resolved on-farm, what needs to go to the vets and what needs to be euthanised.

Fractures can occur for many reasons, sometimes from trauma at birth and sometimes accidentally. How these are dealt with would depend on your confidence level and the degree of fracture damage.

Lower limb fractures can be dealt with on farm if you feel confident enough. Padding must be placed under the casting material to prevent cast rubs and pain relief must be administered.

Higher limb fractures should be dealt with by a vet. Open fractures, where the skin is traumatised and bone can be seen through the wound are at a

high risk of infection and these animals may often need euthanising. Sometimes they can be placed in a cast by a vet and occasionally, in pedigree animals, they can be treated surgically. If in doubt, seek veterinary advice.

Infection

Watery mouth, e.coli scour and rattle belly are all caused by the bacteria e.coli. Most of the time these three conditions can be treated on farm with antibiotics and oral dehydration solution. Severe cases, especially of rattle belly, may benefit from euthanasia on welfare grounds. High value animals can have intravenous fluid therapy provided by a vet and this can improve clinical outcomes.

Prolapsed intestines through the navel are very much a vet job. These can be replaced successfully under general anaesthesia and the repair done. If the intestines are traumatised

and damaged, this makes this procedure much more difficult and unlikely to be successful – in which case the lamb should be euthanised on welfare grounds.

Inverted eyelids (or entropion) is one problem where there is still discussion on how best to deal with it. Sterile water can be injected into the eyelids once everted to keep the eyelid out and this can be performed carefully on farm. Please note that antibiotics should not be used for this procedure, as it is an unnecessary use of antibiotics. A more effective method is to have the vet perform a suture under the eye or place a Michel clip to ensure repair, especially in severe cases.

Hypothermia in lambs is when a hypothermic (cold) lamb has a body temperature of 37.5°C or below. A digital rectal thermometer is vital in your lambing kit.

Continued overleaf.

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▶ If the lamb is less than six hours old it can simply be warmed and, once they are able to hold their head up, may be stomach tubed with colostrum. They have brown fat reserves around their kidneys to support their initial energy requirements.

If the lamb is more than six hours old, they will require an injection of glucose solution into the abdomen to provide energy before they are warmed (see panel). It is very economical, costing around £1 per lamb. In older lambs, warming alone is not sufficient. Once the lambs are able to hold their head up then stomach tube with colostrum.

When warming lambs with a heat lamp, do not put it too close to the lamb's back, especially if the animal is wet, as it can cause burns. Commercial warming boxes are available and plans exist for making your own. It is vital they are free from drafts. Wet lambs should be dried before warming, as evaporating moisture has a cooling effect.

After warming, lambs should respond quite quickly – within 30-60 minutes. Once warmed

up and fed colostrum they can be moved back in with their mother.

Most cases of **cervical prolapse** (lamb bed neck) can be dealt with on farm if you are confident, with the exception of prolapses involving inverted bladders, as these really need a vet to perform an epidural to be replaced successfully.

Prolapses

Prolapses should be cleaned carefully prior to being replaced and then gentle replacement. Post replacement, they should be retained ideally with a harness. Stitches should only be performed after an epidural, making them a vet job, and spoons can cause a large amount of trauma to the ewe as well as infection.

Harnesses can be reused after washing and they are a safe method, in that ewes can lamb through them but they are still effective in reducing the occurrence of repeat prolapses.

If the tissue is torn or severely traumatised, the ewe may be euthanised on welfare grounds, with or without a salvage caesarean, depending on the stage of pregnancy. Ewes that have suffered from a cervical prolapse should be culled as they are likely to have one in the following years.

A prolapsed uterus is nearly always a vet job, due to an epidural being necessary to carry out successful replacement and eversion. If the uterus is not fully everted, then it's likely to come back out again.

If there is severe trauma to the uterus, the ewe should be euthanised on welfare grounds. Ewes that have a uterine prolapse are not likely to reoffend so do not need culling.

With all these problems, if there is any doubt or lack of confidence in on-farm treatment, seek veterinary advice on how best treat.



Intravenous fluid therapy can be provided for high value animals.

Glucose injections

An intra-peritoneal (into the abdomen) glucose injection is a vital technique that is simple to learn and one that all shepherds should be familiar with. It can be used to treat hypothermia in lambs that are more than six hours old. Simple warming is not sufficient enough for older lambs and glucose injections are advised.

- Support the lamb by its front legs.
- Draw up 12.5ml of 50% sterile glucose solution and equal amounts of boiled water from the kettle, equating to 25ml of warm solution to be injected. Or draw up 15ml of 40% solution and equal amounts of boiled water from the kettle, equating to 30ml of warmed solution to be injected.
- Using a sterile one-inch 19g (cream coloured) needle, inject 2.5cm below and 2.5cm to the side of the navel. Direct the needle back towards the lamb's tail head.

Be aware that the solution must remain sterile. Discard any product left seven days after opening. Under no circumstances should a solution be used that is discoloured, past its use by date or having been open more than seven days. Home-made sugar solutions may be contaminated with bacteria and are unsuitable for use.

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Following the flock

We visit Derbyshire, Cumbria and Angus to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Peter Myles

NSA Scottish Region Trustee, Angus

Taking time away from the farm, I recently travelled to Belgium to speak to students at Ghent University Vet School.

As a founder member of the Ghent Lambing and Husbandry Project it holds a very special place in my heart.

The students are sharp, have a good grasp of English, a great sense of humour and are willing to learn and get their hands dirty. When they travel to the UK to complete lambing placements they get experience of vaccinating, worming, physically handling and moving large numbers of sheep with sheepdogs in a practical farming environment, something they find rewarding as there are fewer opportunities in Belgium.

Students care for the general needs of animals and, if lucky, lamb at least one ewe during their brief stay. There can sometimes be a difficult lambing or a prolapse to be dealt with and the students enthusiastically engage and generally improve the situation with their care and attention to detail.

Inevitably at times I have also taught them to skin a dead lamb and put on an orphan for fostering. There will always be sheep to feed and usually pet lambs waiting for milk.

They are always blown away by our hills and scenery, something they don't have in the European lowlands, making me appreciate home that wee bit more.

This project is life changing for the students and has given me a lifetime of friendships. You can look for @ghentlambingproject on social media.

Peter's placement students appreciate the Scottish scenery.



Jack Charleton

NSA Central Region Vice Chair, Derbyshire

Having sorted the ewes for tugging, they look to be in good condition, thanks to a good autumn for grass growth.

However, this has led to favourable conditions for internal parasites too, meaning we've had to faecal egg count our store lambs more frequently than we would normally to monitor burdens and reach target weight thresholds.

We adopt the policy of tugging ewe lambs so we have been busy weighing and sorting through them, selecting those at an appropriate weight to tug. We find with the correct management this is worthwhile.

After a dry summer and autumn, forage crops are about six weeks behind but we have sent most of the store lambs away for winter keep. The November rainfall has certainly helped the forage crops and the August drought now seems a distant memory.

We are tugging the ewes on grass and will then send them to the arable unit to graze cover crops to ensure a fresh bite of grass in the spring to lamb on. We've just scanned our February lambing flock and these will stay nearby so we can monitor as lambing approaches. I have no doubt it will soon be here.



Viv's ewes are in good condition ahead of tugging.

Viv Lewis

NSA Northern Region Chair, Cumbria

In my part of Cumbria we've had fantastic grass growth with enough rain when we needed it to ensure the barn is full of hay and, with a kind autumn, the sheep look good.

This year we decided to get to grips with worm control and reduce anthelmintic use. We now undertake regular fecal eggs counts (FECs) pre and post treatment using a diagnostic tool, only worming if the FEC indicates treatment is necessary, and then only the lambs underperforming on growth rate.

The result is reduced use of wormers that easily covers the cost of the FECs, and the knowledge we are playing a minor part in slowing down wormer resistance and reducing the risk of wormer passing through the animals and into the environment.

I'm a convert. I'm now applying to the Farming in Protected Landscape (FIPL) scheme for a grant to buy the diagnostic kit and three years' subscription for a collaborative group of five of my neighbours.

It was all going swimmingly, with FIPL support for its first farmer group application, but we've hit Defra-related bureaucracy barriers. At times I've almost lost the will to live but I'm determined to get it funded. I am available if Defra wants advice on how the process needs changing.

Next year's focus is clean grazing strategies. I've been looking at the literature and our farm/field plans until my head hurts, as we mob graze and the sheep move frequently. It seems almost as bad as working out a school timetable! If any member can help me out with a beginners guide to developing a clean grazing policy, I'd be all ears.



Jack says grass growth has returned well in Derbyshire this autumn.



Tomas's flocks is much bigger than the Swedish average.

Demand drives Swedish farmer's determination

By Katie James, NSA

Despite the incentive of the average consumption of lamb per head doubling in Sweden in the past 20 years, challenges from the climate, high input costs and dangerous predators means sheep production remains a minority sector.

Sweden is home to around 265,000 ewes split between 8,300 flocks, meaning an average of just 32 ewes per farm. NSA member Tomas Olsson has worked in the industry for the past 30 years and, with 1,000 ewes on his family farm, Norrby, his is one of the largest sheep farming enterprises in the country, located 150km west of Stockholm.

Tomas says: "Sweden is home to many hobby flocks of sheep. Those of us farming commercially are sadly falling in number. The main reason for this is low profitability.

"Our system has a commercial and a pedigree enterprise with Dorset, Texel, Suffolk and Finn sheep. We also have a small number of cattle, some arable ground across our 860acres (350ha) and a contracting business offering baling, lime and manure spreading.

"On our 700 commercial Finn Dorset cross ewes we use Texel and Suffolk rams to produce a good quality, finished lamb, sold to a wholesaler for restaurants. We lamb twice a year, a third of the ewes in January, for production of lambs ready for slaughter during the spring with everything finished indoors. The remainder lamb in April and these are for slaughter in autumn and are grass fed only."

Harsh winters

Faced with the threat of long, cold winters, Tomas must make use of indoor sheep housing for long periods. He explains: "We house all sheep at the start of November, aiming to return them outside to grass in the following May. It's a long time so we need a lot of good, easily managed sheds. This also means high amounts of straw and silage are needed. We feed a total mix ration, a popular choice on larger farms here in Sweden, but we still try and keep our input as low as possible, including labour."

Although sheep graze for only half of the year, Tomas has still worked on improving his grassland. "We introduced rotational grazing 10 years ago and are now able to graze 10 ewes/ha compared to six ewes before this," he comments.

To ensure new genetics can help flock growth, it is common practice for larger farms to import semen and some embryos from the UK. Tomas says: "Because use of breeds such as Texel and Suffolk is not that common here, we need to bring in new bloodlines regularly. We value our flock's high health status, meaning this is a safer way of bringing in new stock for us."

But despite Tomas's progression he is still faced with the nation's biggest sheep issue - wolves.

"In some parts of Sweden wolves are a real threat and there is a lot of politics involved. Many debate how many wolves should be allowed before control is permitted and which areas they are able to be hunted in.



Tomas values the information he receives as an NSA member.

"We are allowed to kill wolves if they attack our flock, but it doesn't help the problem. Provision of some payment to put up fences to protect stock occurs but to do so is a lot of work and many farmers have simply stopped farming instead."

With this experience, Tomas questions why discussion about reintroducing predators still continues at times in the UK. "It would be crazy to introduce a predator and would of course threaten farmer's livelihoods. When you reintroduce an animal that is not hunted and lacks natural predators of its own its behaviour changes, meaning animals lose their fear and therefore become more of a problem," he says.

Successful future

Despite the challenges, Tomas is keen to ensure a successful future for Swedish sheep farmers. "I am Chair of Sweden's Lamb Producer's Association and Vice Chair of the Federation of Swedish Farmers in our region, Mälardalen, working hard to develop Swedish sheep farming.

"Demand for lamb is high but the challenge is we don't produce enough of it ourselves, importing more than 70% of the lamb we eat, mostly from Ireland and New Zealand. I am motivated to change this.

"There is pressure from the market to have fresh lamb all year round, meaning we must look at our systems. Having a good network around us will help and that's why NSA membership is valuable for me as an important way to keep updated."



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