

SHEEP FARMER

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2023
VOL. 43 NO. 1 ISSN 0141-2434

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

TWO NSA AWARDS PRESENTED TO INDUSTRY EXEMPLARS

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*Davies (2018) 'Iceberg' infectious disease of sheep. SHAWG conference, Tamworth.
**Reddacliff, A. (2005) Field evaluation of OJD control using Gudair. Meat and Livestock Australia, Project Number OJD.009. ISBN 1 74036 651 4
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Value farming as a picture, not a pixel

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



It's not at all unusual, but 2023 will undoubtedly bring both challenges and opportunities for British sheep farming.

The trick for us is to turn as many challenges as possible into opportunities. We must do this on an industry scale, for example the transition from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) to Future Farming Schemes. And even if individual challenges become too big to overcome they can be turned into opportunities for someone else and you can feel good about it.

In this edition of Sheep Farmer we take a look back at what NSA was proposing regarding farm support schemes back in late 2016 after the EU referendum, and how this aligns with what is slowly emerging from Defra. We can't yet be sure about the details in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland but NSA will be watching and influencing wherever it can.

In England there is no doubt the loss of BPS will be a challenge for many sheep farmers but, while there is still an absence of detail, there will be opportunities as the Sustainable Farming Incentive, and now Countryside Stewardship+, the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway and other schemes develop further.

Circular economies

This magazine also looks at another emerging challenge with no immediate solution - the loss of market demand for sheep skins. Circular economies are becoming all the rage but they also make sense as they aim to use everything and waste nothing, which is good for profitability and good for the environment. And of course when any part of the animal moves from providing an income to creating a cost, profitability suffers along with reputation.

The fall in demand for skins is due to a volatile global market and, if we want to remove this volatility, we have to innovate and be creative in turning what has become a waste into something of value.

It is increasingly recognised that true farming and food sustainability must include economics, environment, people, communities and values. It's a shame it has taken shattering world events, such as the war in Ukraine, to highlight the importance and fragility of food security, and I hope society learns that the fundamentals of life are far more interconnected than we've realised in the past.

Food production

During the NSA Breakfast Club webinar in January, Daniel Zeichner, Shadow Minister for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, made a significant statement. He said Labour considers food production to be a public good, although stopped short of explaining how the party would support it if it was in power.

Food as a public good is something NSA has consistently supported, whether at a global or national food security level, or whether by local artisan foods and food tourism contributing to wider rural economies.

Wrapping up the Oxford Farming Conference in January, incoming chair Will Evans announced next year's event would focus on diversity - of people, plants and livestock genetics. Who would have imagined this a few years ago? Yet, back then, NSA was busy setting up the British Heritage Sheep project to make a virtue of genetic diversity, of sheep breeds suited and adapted to the place, rather than being a nuisance in the supply chain.

Maybe the time spent on encouraging and persuading policy influencers to look at things as a whole, as opposed to any one thing in isolation, is starting to bear fruit.

NSA has worked hard on this, demonstrating that sheep farming has the potential to be a highly sustainable way of producing food and fibre with its own circular economy and positive environmental footprint.

Discussing this with a Defra researcher recently, it was suggested farmers look at things in pictures while policymakers tend to look at things in pixels. A great analogy, and long may our pictures be nice to look at and live in.



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NSA Sheep Farmer magazine is now kinder to the environment.



Sheep Farmer packaging goes green

You may have noticed a slight difference to the packaging of Sheep Farmer magazine this edition. NSA is pleased to now be using sustainable film wrap made of natural biopolymers, mainly potato and maize starch. There is no polythene in this product so when it degrades there are no microplastics left to pollute soils or watercourses. As a result, it is fully compostable in your household compost heap or can be dug straight into the soil. It will also fully degrade in landfill, although more slowly than in a compost bin. In theory it could be put in your council garden waste or food waste bin, but not all councils will accept it so please check before doing so.

Another top NSA draw for 2023



NSA has launched another fantastic prize draw, giving the nation's sheep farmers chance to improve farm efficiency.

NSA is thrilled to have teamed up with Wise Agriculture this year to offer a chance to win a new Porta-Yards handling system, worth more than £10,000.

Wise Agriculture is a family-run business in North Yorkshire servicing the entire UK.

The company specialises in supplying premium brands of livestock handling equipment from around the world. The 3.0m Porta-Yards mobile sheep handling system by Landquip New Zealand is a combination of functional design and quality materials. Capable of handling 250 sheep, capacity can be increased when used with an existing fence.

Entries will be taken throughout the year with a single winner announced in early 2024. Any UK sheep farmer can enter for free, online or in person at all NSA events this year. More information at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.



Win with NSA and Wise Agriculture in 2023.

Lambing List still open for last minute lambing team additions

As the lambing season approaches, NSA members are reminded the Lambing List is still open for business if you're looking for help at this busy time.

To place a free advert on the list simply complete the online form at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list. Students and others seeking lambing work experience contact members directly to enquire.

Please note the list is designed to assist students with work experience only and is not for advertisements for paid lambers. If you are looking for paid staff (temporary or permanent), please contact NSA Head Office using the contact details on page 1.



Can NSA help you find lambing help this season?

Free entry for NSA sheep events in 2023

Given that entry to NSA sheep events will be free for members again this year, it is worth bearing in mind that it only costs £10 to upgrade from an individual to a joint membership, meaning two people can benefit from free entry rather than one. Visit go.nationalsheep.org.uk/upgrade.

Te Pari giveaway winner announced



The year started with fantastic news for NSA member Frederick Charles Washbourne when he received a call saying he was the randomly selected winner of the 2022 NSA - Te Pari prize giveaway.

Mr Washbourne has won a Te Pari Racewell HD3 mobile sheep handling system and is eagerly awaiting its delivery to his farm near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. An NSA member for almost 30 years, Mr Washbourne runs a flock of North Country Mules as well as working as a fencer and shearing contractor. NSA will provide another update once the system has been delivered.

Make NSA membership savings by direct debit

Did you know NSA members paying for their membership subscription save 20% in their first year of paying by direct debit? This saving can be made at any time, whether this is your first year of NSA membership or your 10th! To take advantage of this saving contact NSA Head Office – contact details on page 1.

End of Amazon Smile – thanks for the support

NSA thanks any members who have donated to the association in recent years through an Amazon Smile account. Sadly Amazon is withdrawing this support for charities so no further money can be raised to support NSA in this way. Depending on when you read this magazine, you could squeeze one last online shopping spree in before it closes on Monday 20th February!

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

NSA builds on promoting lambing best practice

NSA encourages responsible use of medicine throughout the sheep farming year, but even more so as lambing approaches for many members.

Targets and good practice guidelines developed in partnership with the industry by the Responsible Use of Medicine in Agriculture alliance and Sheep Veterinary Society all indicate it is not appropriate for newborn lambs to be treated routinely with antibiotics – a message highlighted by NSA in a recent webinar.

Treatments should be targeted towards high-risk individuals, in line with a proactive, flock-specific health plan. If this feels like a leap of faith in some flocks, it is worth looking at the many producers who, with their vets, have made this change successfully and maintain good levels of lamb welfare.

For those interested in hearing more, you can watch back the NSA webinar on best practice at lambing time, discussing potential impacts of external factors such as vaccine shortage and antibiotic withdrawals, ewe condition, hygiene and colostrum quality. Visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars, and read more on pages 42-50.



Blanket antibiotic treatment encourages resistance.

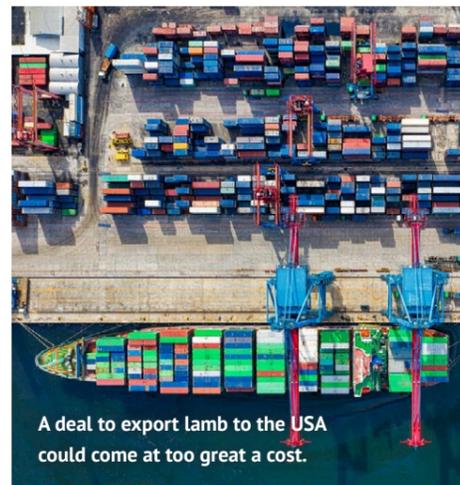
NSA highlights the need for caution on species reintroductions

NSA submitted a comprehensive response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's call for evidence on species reintroductions, highlighting the complexities of our ecosystems and the equilibrium of natural habitats.

NSA has called for much clearer government and regulatory positions to ensure any reintroductions cannot happen by accident, with any future proposals developed with extensive consultation with impacted businesses. For a copy of the full response, contact policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.



Species reintroductions need to be done carefully.



A deal to export lamb to the USA could come at too great a cost.

NSA expresses concern with US trade deal

In October 2022, British lamb was exported to the USA for the first time in over 20 years, opening a market of over 300m consumers to high-quality, British lamb – a great achievement.

The shipment was made possible by a series of high-level talks with the US Government, specific to lamb. But there are now rumours within the US Department of Agriculture that lamb will be affected by the States' decision not to sign a trade deal for agricultural goods with the UK unless the agreement includes no tariffs and no barriers.

NSA has expressed concern over this type of agreement, as it contradicts the UK's high standards of animal health and welfare production by allowing imports produced to lower standards and which are exempt from regulations inhibiting the use of routine treatments, such as hormones.

The US also wants to embrace technologies such as gene editing to reduce reliance on fertilisers and pesticides, which means a trade deal signed between the UK and the USA would include crops produced in this way. Senior USDA representatives who have made comments about this also point out the USA would not want to see barriers to exports of hormone-treated beef or chorine-washed chicken. NSA will continue to watch this closely.



Sheep and lamb skin disposal is proving difficult for some abattoirs.

Sheep skin disposal a problem for abattoirs

NSA is aware a number of abattoirs are experiencing a loss in demand for lamb/sheep skins, resulting in stockpiling and/or disposal at a cost to the plant. Losing skin value or having to pay for disposal is having an unwelcome impact on margins at abattoirs where operation costs are high and they have been paying good prices for lambs.

NSA has spoken with mid-range abattoirs to explore opportunities in wool circular economies.

Further challenges are being created as wool can negatively impact on rendering equipment in meat processing plants. One potential option for the longer term is to knife shear skins, enabling them to go for rendering and wool be used elsewhere. NSA is in contact with the British Meat Processors Association on other disposal options and these are being explored with Defra.

Still no movement with skin-on sheep

There is still no progress on work by NSA and other industry bodies to develop a proposal to change domestic legislation and allow production of skin-on sheep meat (smokies).

The proposal was shared with the Food Standards Agency back in 2020 and, disappointingly, a decision on approval is yet to be made. NSA will continue to chase for a decision to legalise the practice.

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

NSA regional reports

NSA Central Region

By Lizzy Wells, Manager

NSA Central Region made a good start to the year with an interesting trip to British Wool's main depot and then a nearby scouring plant in Braford, West Yorkshire.

Our next event will be the Annual Regional Members' Meeting on Thursday 23rd February at Bakewell Market, Derbyshire, starting at 7.30pm. Defra representatives will join the meeting to update on future farming schemes, providing a unique opportunity for attendees to ask questions about new support structures. Nicola Noble, NSA Project Manager, will also provide an update on NSA activity.

Planning is underway for Field Days across the region focusing on sheep health and nutrition. There will also be a summer farm walk – so it's looking good for a busy year of events.



NSA Central Region began its year with a visit to British Wool.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

Penrith Livestock Mart was the location of the Annual Regional Members' Meeting in early February.

The region welcomed Emma Bradbury, NSA Policy Manager, as well as Colin Bateman, AHDB Chair, who gave an insightful update on the levy board's recent activity. In the main meeting, the officeholders currently in post remain unchanged.

I hope you all have a successful lambing and have the date set firmly in your diary for NSA North Sheep on Wednesday 7th June, an event not to be missed for sheep farmers in the north of England and, indeed, further afield. [Event details on page 19.](#)

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

The NSA Scottish Region Annual Members' Meeting was held in January in Aberdeenshire to transact the election, reapproval and nomination of various officeholders and committee members.

The outcome was a top table of Peter Myles as Chair, Mary Dunlop as Treasurer, and Peter Myles and Pamela Nicol as Regional Trustees. James Scott was also elected as the Scottish representative for the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee.

Immediately prior to this attendees enjoyed a farm walk at the James Hutton Institute's Glensaugh Research farm by kind permission of Farm Manager Donald Barrie. All thoroughly enjoyed Mr Barrie's presentation, which proved to be thought provoking and interactive on the practicalities of changing farming practices when implementing climate change mitigation.



NSA Scottish Region at Glensaugh Research farm.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

The region looks forward to its Annual Regional Members' Meeting at the Stockman's Restaurant, Exeter Market, on Tuesday 21st February at 7.30pm, followed by a buffet supper.

Members and friends are welcome to join us for an interesting evening including talks on the increasingly visible topic of soil health and biology and its value in livestock production. Emma Bradbury, NSA Policy Manager, will also join the meeting to give an update on policy work NSA is undertaking.

Details of additional regional farm walks and events will be shared throughout the year but, in the meantime, don't forget to add NSA Sheep South West to your diaries. [Event details on pages 8.](#)



NSA South West Region will hold its ARMM in February.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region welcomed both new and familiar faces to its Annual Regional Members' Meeting in Worcestershire in January.

Following the formal business, which saw no changes to existing officeholders, Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, gave a fascinating insight into the work of NSA over the past year, generating healthy discussion on several topics.

Emma Steele of AHDB followed, presenting on the levy board's successful 'We Eat Balanced' campaign. The region is now awaiting confirmation of a meeting with Defra in late February to update on the future farming schemes. Details of date and location are to be confirmed.



Phil Stocker joined NSA Marches Region's ARMM.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

The NSA Northern Ireland Region Annual Members' Meeting was held in early February in Antrim.

The regional committee was pleased to be joined by Stuart Ashworth and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Alexander Boyd of Newtownabbey, County Antrim, also attended to share his experiences with NSA. Alexander is already an active participant of his local sheep business development group and an active young farmer, having won YFC's Northern Ireland Young Farmer of the Year. He also competed last year in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition.

The workload now increases for our region as we get closer to NSA Sheep Northern Ireland. [Event details on page 19.](#)

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

In early February in Hampshire, NSA South East Region held its first face-to-face Annual Regional Members' Meeting for three years.

In his report as Chair, Yann Le Du reflected on the programme of events held in 2022, thanking committee members for their involvement.

Farm walks on the Isle of Wight, in Kent and in Wiltshire were popular, proving the demand for on farm activities. The NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition held in conjunction with Southern Shears looks set to become an annual fixture and the inaugural Field Days were well received by all. Another first in 2022 was the regional ram sale held at Thame Market in September.

Highlights for 2023 include the biennial Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Conference in October, the Next Generation Shepherd competition in May, a second ram sale in the autumn, farm walks and more!

NSA Eastern Region

By Josh Brock, Manager

As I begin my time as NSA Eastern Region Manager, I'd like to thank Jonathan and Carrol Barber for looking after the region so well during their tenure.

With the Christmas break now a distant memory, we are well into planning for 2023. NSA Eastern Region is looking forward to an eventful year. The first will be in late February, an in-person presentation from Defra about accessing future farm support – details to follow soon.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

As part of efforts to forge stronger links with Wales YFC, myself and regional vice chair Caryl Hughes accepted an invitation to speak at its Rural Affairs Conference in January, updating on the NSA Next Generation programme in 2023/24.

This magazine may just arrive with you before the NSA Cymru/Wales Region Annual Members' Meeting on Thursday 16th February at the Royal Welsh Showground, starting at 11.30am and followed by lunch.

Katie James, NSA Communications Manager, and Michael Burley, NSA Next Generation Ambassador, will provide NSA updates. Dr Gavin Watkins, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, will talk about sheep scab, the new Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme, international disease risks and Northern Ireland exports and imports. To book your place (and lunch) contact me directly.

Plans for NSA Welsh Sheep are well underway. You can follow us on social media on @NSAWelshSheep and @welsh_sheep23. [Contact details on facing page and NSA Welsh Sheep info on page 8.](#)



NSA Cymru/Wales Region is strengthening ties with YFC Cymru.

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NSA celebrates contribution to the UK sheep sector with two key awards

The NSA Scottish Region Annual Members' Meeting provided the perfect opportunity to present the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep sector.

The event, held at the Glensaugh Research Farm, Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire, in January, brought NSA members together to learn more about the latest research in the sector, something the winner has encouraged and facilitated in various ways for many years.

Scottish sheep farmer Ian Duncan Millar was announced as the 2022 award recipient late last year and was delighted to accept it from Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, in front of fellow NSA Scottish Region members.

Exemplary leader

Mr Duncan Millar is regarded as one of the most exemplary leaders within the UK sheep industry. Through his support and early adoption of numerous programmes, including performance recording in hill sheep, early co-operative breeding schemes and through his role as a highly valued adviser to researchers developing breeding



Mr Duncan Millar receives his award from Phil Stocker at the NSA Scottish Annual Members' Meeting.

indexes for UK hill sheep, he has been instrumental in the multifaceted progression of the sector.

As well as running his farm in Perthshire, Mr Duncan Millar has held multiple positions on industry boards and committees and became an OBE in 2010. He has had a long and active interest in sheep health, working particularly closely with the Moredun Foundation, and has provided vision and expertise while supporting collaboration with industry leaders, technical advisers and producers to ensure the impact of accurate livestock science.

Mr Duncan Millar remained modest on receiving his award and comments: "It was a huge surprise and enormous honour to be awarded the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award. To think of all the folk who have been here before me is quite mind blowing.

"I have been fortunate to have a number of interesting 'jobs' in the industry, as well as my day-job as a farmer, so have seen things through that prism. If as a result I have helped our fantastic industry along the way, it's been an immeasurable bonus."

Unsung hero recognised

Having recently changed to being an annual award, the winner of the NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for Unsung Hero was also announced late last year.

This award, exclusively for NSA officeholders, committee members, volunteers, supporters and staff members who go above and beyond for the good of NSA, went to sheep meat enthusiast Bob Kennard.

As a former farmer and director of his own meat processing and butchery company, Mr Kennard works alongside NSA, from his home in the Welsh Borders, on several key projects promoting artisan sheep meat products.

This includes ensuring continued consumption of mutton through the Make More of Mutton initiative and, more recently, the increased appreciation of the variation between age, breed and farmed countryside native sheep

meat can offer consumers through the British Heritage Sheep project. Mr Kennard has also been relentless in campaigning for the future of small, independent abattoirs.

Worthy winner

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "There couldn't be a more worthy winner of this award. Bob has worked tirelessly and well beyond expectations to create opportunities for and to ensure a future for Britain's native sheep breeds, specifically in NSA's work on the British Heritage Sheep project.

"We still have a long way to go with this scheme, but it holds huge potential and, when it starts really bearing fruit, it will be down to Bob's tenacity, commitment and determination."

Mr Kennard, who will be presented with the award at NSA Welsh Sheep in May, comments:



Bob Kennard was recognised for his under-appreciated work on sheep meat.

"I feel very honoured and am proud to be involved with NSA through my work. NSA supports so many sheep farmers and helps the industry in so many ways, often unseen."

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1. Moroni et al. Effect of intramammary infection in Bergamasca meat sheep on milk parameters and lamb growth. J Dairy Res. 2007 Aug;74(3):340-4. doi: 10.1017/S0022029907002506. Epub 2007 Apr 24.

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

3. Sánchez. R et al. Case of study: Evaluation of the impact of mastitis vaccination on mastitis treatment in a dairy goat farm in the southwest of Spain. WBC 2016. Poster

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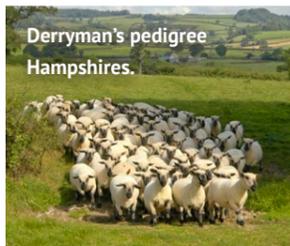
Devon hosts NSA event

The organisers of NSA Sheep South West are looking forward to welcoming visitors to Peterhayes Farm on Wednesday 10th May 2023, home of three generations of the Derryman family and an ideal venue for the event.

The Derrymans are a well-known and respected family in South West England, the UK and further afield, having ran a tradition mixed farming enterprise at Peterhayes, Honiton, for more than 100 years.

The organising committee is sure the venue will provide an excellent and informative day, following the tried and trusted formula of trade exhibitors and breed societies alongside seminars, workshops and various competitions.

There will be lamb selection, fleece competitions and the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition with open and student sections. The sale of sheepdogs will take place in the afternoon with high quality dogs being entered.



Farm tour

A full programme of workshops and seminars is being planned and there will be great interest in the farm tour showcasing three pedigree flocks of Hampshire Downs, Suffolks and Romneys. The farm business also includes 120 dairy cows, so the day will also look at how these are incorporated alongside the sheep interests. Event information, trade booking, competition entry dates and forms, and other details can all be found on the event website www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk or by contacting event organiser Sue Martyn. *Dates of all NSA sheep events on page 19.*

NSA Sheep South West 2023
National Sheep Association Organised by NSA South West Region

Wednesday 10th May 9am – 5pm
By kind invitation of the Derryman Family
Peterhayes Farm, Yarcombe, Honiton, EX14 9LW

- * Workshops
- * Competitions
- * Sheepdog Sale
- * NSA Next Generation Young Shepherd - £1,000 prize fund
- * NSA Next Generation Student Young Shepherd - £500 prize fund
- * Photography Competition
- * Trade & Breed Society Stands
- * Demonstrations
- * Fleece Competitions

No dogs on site except assistance dogs & those entered in the sale.
Admission - £15 Non NSA Members.
NSA Members - Free on production of card & subject to conditions.
YFC members/students £7.50 with current card.
Under 16 - Free. Group Rates Available – details from Event Organiser
Further information from Sue Martyn.
Tel: 01409 271385. Mob: 07967 512660.
Email: suem@nationalsheep.org.uk
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or email helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Join us for Welsh showcase

Plans are progressing for NSA Welsh Sheep on Tuesday 16th May 2023, the first NSA main event in Wales in four years and one not to be missed.

With the event taking place just a five-minute drive from Newtown, Powys, it will be easily accessible from all parts of Wales, the borders and beyond, and will be a welcome day out for anyone with an interest in sheep farming.

Hosts this year are Huw and Sioned Owen, along with their son Dafydd, at Red House Farm, Aberhafesp, Powys. Attracting a wider range of visitors, this year the event is excited to welcome school and college groups as well as its loyal following of sheep farmers.



Red House Farm.

New entrants

The event will emphasise the importance of the younger generation and their prospects in a rapidly changing industry. It's particularly appropriate as Dafydd Owen, at 24, is a key part of the family business and was proudly awarded the title for best Beltex flock in Wales last year.

Red House extends to 550 acres (220ha) and rises to 855ft (260m) above sea level, with views down to the Severn Valley. Huw's late father, Bryn Owen of Sandilands Farm, Tywyn, Gwynedd, bought Red House, a former dairy farm, in 2013 for the family, who also run a caravan park and farming business in Tywyn.

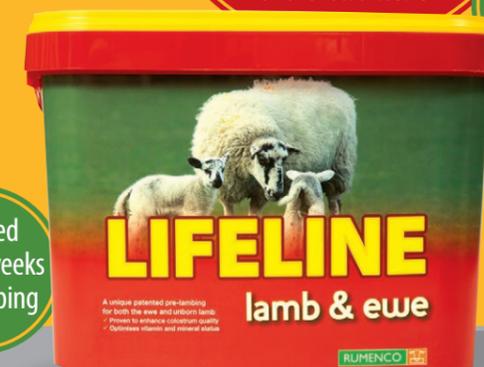
Event organiser Helen Roberts, says she is excited to welcome everybody back after the four-year break. There will be the usual seminars and more than 150 trade stands to attract visitors.

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What we asked for and what we got – the evolution of farming schemes

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

Nearly seven years on from the UK voting to leave the EU, it is interesting to consider the work done on new farming legislation, environmental regulations and support programmes compared to NSA's original requests.

Any consideration can only really focus on England, as Westminster, long keen to reform agricultural policy, has forged further ahead than the devolved nations.

Brexit brought about the principle of public money for public goods, with MPs suggesting farmers could be encouraged towards greater productivity (so they were less reliant on subsidies), allowing a move towards financial reward for delivering (primarily) environmental benefits.

The post-Brexit 'Health and Harmony' plan was followed by the Agriculture Act (November 2020) and then 'The path to sustainable farming' transition plan, outlining initiatives to increase biodiversity, restore landscapes, promote animal welfare, and increase productivity through sustainable farming practices, livestock health, and investment in new equipment and technology.

Environment schemes

With the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) at the core, there is a wider framework of Future Farming and Countryside Productivity schemes, with a clear transition from a phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) between 2021 and 2027.

NSA was clear in its position and supported the principle of incentivising good farming practices while being fairly rewarded for delivery of public goods. While we have some concerns about certain elements and the level of detail in some areas, NSA believes SFI and other strands of initial

funding go some way to meeting our initial asks, and that plans for future development of these schemes will take us closer still.

Arguably the initial offers were unambitious and low in reward, but the ambition for 2023 is now known with an expanding range of SFI, Countryside Stewardship standards, and Landscape Recovery offers. Detail has now been announced on payment rates for the expanded schemes with a launch planned for this summer. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway launch is imminent and, we're told, should be open for applications in early February.



NSA believes the new schemes will continue to expand rapidly over the next 24 months, with the ability for claimants to add emerging standards to their existing agreements. Having started with soil health, moorland management and health and welfare, the addition of rewards for hedgerows, integrated pest management and nutrient management, plus advanced levels for the existing two soils standards, has now been confirmed.

Nevertheless, NSA remains concerned about support for upland areas and the low level of offer for less favoured area farms and commons in these early stages. NSA is aware a proper value has not yet been put on environmental outcomes, and that ELMS frequently requires a cost to be borne by the farmer. This is not, nor was

it ever going to be, money with the freedom for producers to spend it as they wished.

Large and small scale capital grants for equipment that improves environmental performance and water quality, slurry infrastructure, and farming equipment/technology funding has been confirmed.

NSA is continually pushing for further details on the various strands of funding and development to allow farmers to plan for the future – and is pleased to see some of these emerging.

New announcements

In mid-November headlines hit the press surrounding a review of ELMS due to ministerial changes. Rumours swirled that the scheme would be scrapped. What emerged during January was confirmation the Future Farming Schemes will continue much as planned with Pathway and the capital grants left unscathed. SFI is to be maintained and expanded, Local Nature Recovery abandoned but picked up through a Countryside Stewardship+ offer, and Landscape Recovery will continue for larger scale collaborative projects.

With the January announcement came details of payment rates for the new additional standards and an uplift in payment rates for Countryside Stewardship revenue (average 10%) and capital payments along with an additional SFI Management Payment of £20/ha for the first 124 acres (50ha). This means farms over this size will receive up to £1,000 per year in addition to their agreement, to cover the administrative costs of participation.

NSA is continuing to work hard to ensure farming is kept at the heart of these new schemes and will encourage the government to provide detail and transparency for businesses – both within the schemes already announced for England and those under development in the devolved nations.

Summary of NSA's requests compared to current schemes

What NSA asked for	What is being developed/delivered
Capital investment support/grant funding to encourage investment in productivity, efficiency and innovation, and environmental features such as hedges or tree protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farming Equipment & Technology Fund including EID, sheep handling and weighing equipment. Farming Transformation Fund including slurry infrastructure, adding value, water management and improving farm productivity. Expected Welfare Capital Grant Options in 2023.
Best practice/health schemes including farm health planning, disease screening, post mortems and involvement in accreditation schemes.	Animal Health and Welfare Pathway launch expected early in 2023, including a funded vet visit to identify specific on-farm concerns developing into parasite and disease control plan(s). Future Pathway options to include in depth disease screening and monitoring. In contrast to all other livestock species sheep farmers, working with their vets, have the freedom to focus on their priorities.
Support for sustainable farming practices such as soil improvements, measures to address soil pH and effective management of manures.	SFI to incentivise use of sustainable farming practices with a focus on soil health.
Public goods reward scheme with a more intuitive, outcome-based approach based on desired pasture/habitat description.	Partly covered by SFI but also expected to focus on the enhanced Countryside Stewardship+.
Support for farm/investment/business planning to ensure good investments and a level of planning.	Farming Resilience Fund provides business support to farmers and land managers in the first years of BPS transition.
Ability for any practicing farmers, including new entrants, to access capital grants and sheep health schemes (not just BPS claimants).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some capital grant funding can be accessed with a simple registration process with RPA. Defra has committed to Pathway funding being available to anyone registered with the RPA by/in 2024. Ongoing pilot for the New Entrant Support Scheme.
Food production to be recognised as a public good, whether to provide food security or to contribute to local rural economies.	The current government has refused to accept food production as a public good, but Labour has agreed food production is a public good.

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UK trade – what's happened post Brexit and where is it going next?

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

NSA is continuing to work with industry bodies to not only maximise UK export opportunities, but also develop the demand for British lamb at home in the UK.

We all know Brexit was a worrying time for the UK sheep sector. After various agreements through 2019 and 2020, the crucial agreement was signed at the 13th hour, removing the major concerns over UK lamb destined for EU export. Once signed, the UK Government was able to look to the horizon and search for future opportunities.

The headlines have focused on potential New Zealand and Australian free trade agreements (FTAs). There is talk of a 15-year transition period, suggesting UK governments are comfortable with where this could transition us to.

Trade risks

In a worst-case scenario for the sheep sector, signed FTAs with New Zealand and Australia could see our entire consumption volumes of sheepmeat being imported, while British producers are driven to higher environmental and welfare standards and struggle to compete on price, so will become more reliant on high value export markets. There is no real equivalence in environmental standards between our countries and these trade deals place an unnecessary risk on our industry. As a result, this remains high on the NSA policy agenda.



UK health, welfare and environmental credentials for lamb provide strong trade opportunities.

But looking at wider and future opportunities lying ahead for British lamb, a lot has happened in the last four years. As the third largest exporter of sheep meat globally, the UK is a significant player in worldwide markets, with a keen eye particularly on China, the USA and France as the biggest importers.

The willingness and ability to pay for sheep meat varies across the globe. As the wealth of a nation grows, so does demand for meat and dairy products. Forecasts indicate there will be a surge of more than 40% in middle-class consumers globally during the next 10 years, growth that is expected to be concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region.

This is an area the UK currently has limited access to. However, Japan has lifted its decades long ban of UK beef and lamb in recent years,

resulting in an FTA. China has also lifted the ban on UK beef exports and talks are also ongoing to gain access to the South Korean market, which could be an advantage for lamb exports.

Even so, it is worth remembering the majority of Chinese import demand is currently met by Australia and New Zealand, which account for 98% of total imports, and both these countries have a scrapie-free status so can navigate phytosanitary controls more easily than the UK.

America

Looking towards North and South America, you may remember the headlines last year highlighting the first UK lamb export to the US following a two-decade long ban. The UK currently has access to the Canadian sheep meat market at zero tariff, but not the USA or Mexico.

The UK trades lamb into the US under most favoured nation status. This means there is a 0.7% kg tariff on lamb and 2.8% kg on mutton. The same tariffs apply to New Zealand but not Australia. The USA and Mexico are at the start of engaging in trade discussions with hopes remaining high that lamb will see significant new opportunities.

Moving across the globe there are several opportunities for UK lamb exports and trade deals already struck across a large proportion of North Africa and the Middle East. Low volumes of trade are taking place in these areas, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, under low tariff World Trade Organisation rules.

NSA will continue to work closely with governments, retailers, trade bodies and educators to ensure the benefits and environmental credentials of UK lamb are not overlooked in any future trade deals.



NSA remains vigilant on future trade deals, including New Zealand and Australia FTAs.



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Removing the confusion on legislation for castration and tailing of lambs

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

Castration and tailing procedures in lambs continue to come under scrutiny from various places, with ongoing reviews of current management practices.

Initial recommendations were published as far back as 2008 by the then Farm Animal Welfare Committee (now the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC)), bringing tailing and castration into the spotlight. In response to this, some veterinary practices have introduced the three Rs – reduction, refinement and replacement – into flock health plans when considering castration and tailing.

In 2020, the British Veterinary Association (BVA) announced it would like to see a reduction in tailing and castration, especially where alternative management techniques are available. At the time, NSA urged BVA to invest energy in consideration for pain relief alongside these procedures.

NSA continues to reiterate the health and welfare benefits of both castration and tailing but is also aware there needs to be improvements, and accepts these operations should not be carried out without consideration of alternative management practices.

Management

Many sheep farmers are doing their own risk assessments and leaving some lambs entire, while some are avoiding tailing where they can. But NSA has also worked hard to highlight the poor health and welfare implications of forcing farmers to stop castration or tailing, such as pregnant ewe lambs being presented for slaughter and the increased risk of flystrike.

Summary of legal options in the UK for tail docking and castration of lambs.

	Age	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
Tail docking	Up to 7 days	Elastrator	Elastrator	Elastrator	Elastrator
	7 days – 3 months	Knife or docking iron plus anaesthetic	Knife or docking iron plus anaesthetic	Knife or docking iron	Any other method plus anaesthetic
	3 months +	Same as above	Same as above	Not permitted	Only by a vet
Castration	Up to 7 days	Elastrator	Elastrator	Elastrator	Elastrator
	7 days – 3 months	Burdizzo or immuno-castration	Burdizzo or immuno-castration	Any other method plus anaesthetic	Any other method plus anaesthetic
	3 months +	Surgical plus anaesthetic	Surgical plus anaesthetic	Not permitted	Surgical plus anaesthetic

There are two known tools under development. Numnuts is one, which applies anaesthetic at the same time as applying a rubber ring. The other, called Clipfitter, uses no pain relief but crushes the nerve cord in the same way as a burdizzo and applies a clip, meaning the testes fall off in time.

Trials

Both these tools have been trialled in Scotland (monitored by Scotland's Rural College), and while the use of Clipfitter has been approved in Scotland, the AWC is still to provide an opinion in England and Wales.

One challenge for Numnuts is use of lignocaine as the anaesthetic in the applicator. This product is not licensed for use in the UK and will frustratingly take time to be changed. In England it appears both tools would need a change in regulations to allow them to be used, applying a ring or a clip after one week of age.

NSA is closely engaged in the issues surrounding castration and tailing and will continue to act on your behalf to ensure a practical outcome. In the meantime, it urges members to be aware of the existing rules and regulations.



Tailing and castration advice

- Be aware the guidelines vary between UK nations and depend on the age of the lamb being tail docked or castrated (see table).
- Tail docking must be done by a competent person with enough tail left to cover the anus or vulva.
- Only castrate when lambs are to be kept beyond sexual maturity and it's needed to avoid welfare problems related to managing males. Due to the risk of mis-mothering – which can lead to starvation – you shouldn't castrate until the bond between ewe and lamb is properly established.



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Demand from sheep skin markets has declined sharply.



Concern over sheep skin markets and increasing processing costs

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

A hangover from the covid pandemic, coupled with the global economic downturn, is a dramatic reduction in demand for sheep skins – with knock-on effects for the supply chain.

Within the sheep supply chain, exports largely address imbalances in demand for different cuts of meat and the higher supply of meat at certain times of year. Also, additional markets have been required to take items where there is no or minimal demand on the domestic market, including offal and skins.

An important part of optimising returns from lambs and cull sheep is to try to get value from every part of the animal. This is where the processors come into their own, placing cuts and fifth quarter products into different markets, sometimes globally, particularly with parts of the carcass not normally consumed in the UK.

Optimising returns

Optimising carcass returns includes getting a value for sheep skins and, although demand can be volatile, there is normally a market for exporting for skins into China and Eastern Europe. Given that domestic demand for skins is limited, this export trade is hugely important, often returning £5-£8/head.

The last few months have seen demand tail off alarmingly, with some processors now reporting skins stacking up with no demand. A few have even gone as far as sending skins for rendering. The result is that skins are now creating a cost

rather than a value, putting pressure on returns and profitability.

Rendering skins is not easy, and its expensive. They can be mixed with other category three waste material, but concentrations of skins, heavy with wool, can block machinery. Additionally, one of the attributes of wool, particularly wet wool, is it doesn't burn easily.

Alternative markets

This could be a short-term problem and previous demand will likely return during the year, but the world is an increasingly unpredictable place and relying on a small number of traditional markets is a risky strategy. To overcome this, a number of abattoirs are starting to look at other options.

One example is Forge Farm Meats, an abattoir

in Kent that has purchased a knife shearing machine to take the wool off the skins. But there are still challenges to overcome, such as difficulties handling wet wool and obstacles selling skin wool to users who fear using it could damage their reputation.

The company says the investment in the technology has proven to be 'an effective and efficient method' and it is therefore 'disappointed' to find a lack of interest in the wool afterwards.

As a natural by-product, the skin wool could be utilised to make lower grade products like insulation for houses – but it appears further investment is needed to ensure the wool is utilised rather than abattoirs having to pay for it to be disposed of as a waste product.

NSA will continue to work with processors and wool users to find a solution.



Processing costs further down the supply chain are creating sheep skin backlogs.

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Northern Ireland sheep farmers need assurances about future support

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Back in late 2022, NSA helped set up the Northern Ireland Sheep Taskforce, which continues to work closely with DAERA.

The main focus of this taskforce is looking into a way forward on a resilient payment structure to help the Northern Ireland sheep sector. Such support payments become more essential, especially as we enter 2023 and see lamb prices have dropped, allowing New Zealand lamb to be more competitive in the UK.

NSA Northern Ireland Region will continue to highlight the importance of these support

payments as we continue into 2023, fighting hard to ensure we are not forgotten versus cattle and other enterprises.

Genetics group

The committee here in NSA Northern Ireland Region is also awaiting the approval of a Livestock Ruminant Genetics Group by DAERA, which will hopefully soon be announced. The economic proposal for the group has been based on data from the dairy and beef sectors but NSA has been assured, once approved, the sheep sector will be invited to be involved directly.

It is only right that sheep are included in any discussion around genetics, and NSA will be well

placed to compare conversations with what is being talked about in the other UK nations.



Welsh sheep farmers concerned over increased charges for dip disposal

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region has responded to the Natural Resources Wales consultation on the proposed fees and charge increases to disposal of dip products.

Our response highlighted the basic lack of evidence and clarity for many of the increases proposed. Indeed, it is a source of frustration, as no attempt was made to provide a breakdown of current costs to allow the industry to properly evaluate the proposed charge increases or to determine where value for money is – or is not –

being provided to the sector. For a full copy of the response please email policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.

This consultation comes shortly after Lesley Griffiths, Rural Affairs Minister, announced the Welsh Government would be awarding Coleg Sir Gar a three-year contract to work on eradicating sheep scab in Wales.

Sheep scab

As part of the announcement, the Minister cited sheep scab as one of the 'most contagious diseases of sheep and a difficult challenge for the industry', adding that 'effective control on a local

and national scale is essential'. NSA concurs that sheep must be scab-free to be productive and to have a good quality of life.

By the time you read this, NSA Cymru/Wales Region, in conjunction with Farming Connect, will have just hosted a technical webinar covering the implications of the Agriculture Pollution Regulations. The webinar was planned to highlight the changes facing the sheep sector over the coming months in terms of the new control of regulations for Wales.

If you missed the webinar, watch it back at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

NSA Scottish Region looks at downstream effects of farming schemes

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



In 2022 we were made ever more aware costs of production can change overnight. So what will 2023 bring?

Lamb prices have already crashed at the start of January, which won't have been helped by the fact only 9% of Scottish-produced sheep meat is consumed nationally. We have a serious reliance on our markets south of the border and internationally.

Given the trade deals announced since our departure from the EU, there needs to be a fundamental shift domestically to reassure members of the longevity of our meat markets.

Cabinet secretary

At the end of January, NSA Scottish Region hosted Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, on farm by kind permission of the Ivory family and Pamela Nicol, Farm Manager at Doldy Farms, Glenisla, Angus.

There will be no surprise that high on the agenda was future agricultural policy but, given the trials and tribulations of recent years, focus was also on trade agreements, food security, species reintroductions and various consultations that have the potential to inflict irreparable damage on the sheep industry.

Agricultural policy

Years on, we are still waiting for more detail on what the next tranche of agricultural policy will look like, other than what is already known about it focusing heavily on climate change mitigation and nature restoration, until 2045 at least.

But what happens after the net zero targets of 2045 and 2050 have been somehow reached? Where will we be left and how many of us will still be farming given the significant changes needed shortly? Sooner rather than later we have to understand agriculture cannot achieve net zero by efficiency alone. We ourselves will also need to offset yet, despite needing a huge culture and

mindset shift, other industries are still knocking on our door to offset their emissions.

Alongside offsetting, our biodiversity and nature are both important and none of these critical topics should be looked at in isolation.

Our world has changed substantially in the past 10 and 20 years but what will land use in Scotland look like once we have initiated what is ahead?



Join us at an NSA event this year



NSA Sheep Events 2023

NSA Sheep South West

Wednesday 10th May
Peterhayes Farm, Yarcombe, Honiton, Devon, EX14 9LW. *By kind permission of the Derryman family.*

NSA Welsh Sheep

Tuesday 16th May
Red House Farm, Aberhafesp, Newton, Powys, SY16 3HH. *By kind permission of the Owen Family.*

NSA North Sheep

Wednesday 7th June
Bradford House Farm, Ponteland, Northumberland, NE20 0HA. *By kind permission of the Woodman family.*

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland

Tuesday 4th July
Tynan Estate, County Armagh, BT60 4QZ. *By kind permission of K. Kingan and P. Mant.*

NSA is also planning interactive and engaging regional events such as Field Days, farm walks and much more for the summer of 2023 – check NSA Sheep Farmer magazine and other NSA communications for further updates.



NSA Ram Sales 2023

NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale
Monday 7th August
Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY

NSA South West Ram Sale

Wednesday 16th August
Exeter Livestock Market, Devon, EX2 8FD

NSA Eastern Region Rugby Ram Sale

Friday 25th August
Rugby Farmers Market, Warwickshire, CV8 2RG

NSA South East Region Ram Sale

Friday 1st September
Thame Farmers Market, Oxfordshire, OX9 3FP

Melton Midlands Sheep Fair including the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale

Friday 15th September
Melton Mowbray Market, Leicestershire, LE13 1JY

NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale

Monday 18th September
Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY

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The NSA Next Generation winter conferences included practical workshops.

NSA Next Generation winter conferences inspire and inform



NSA Next Generation winter conferences attracted enthusiastic young sheep farmers from across the north and south east of England at the end of January.

Aiming to appeal to all young sheep farmers, from new entrants looking to get a foot in the door to those wanting to expand an enterprise or take on more responsibility in a long-established business, the conferences offered a range of workshops led by industry experts as well as talks from NSA Next Generation Ambassadors sharing their own experiences.

The first event was warmly hosted by CCM Auctions at Skipton Mart, North Yorkshire. In an area well known for its many sheep farms, this conference drew a large crowd and created a positive atmosphere, kick starting NSA's 2023 Next Generation activity with a bang.

Motivation

NSA Communications Manager Katie James, who coordinated the events, comments: "The NSA Next Generation winter conferences are always a great motivator for the young people who join. Where most discussion surrounding agriculture often focuses on the challenges it faces for the future, these events provide a platform to inspire the next generation that there can be a positive way ahead for the young people striving to be involved. It was a great day with plenty of opportunity to learn new things and meet like-minded young sheep farmers."

Later in the same week, a second event took place at Ashford Auction Centre, Kent, by kind permission of Hobbs Parker. This was the first time such an NSA event had been held in the far south east of England and the effort paid off with an engaged group of sheep enthusiasts coming together for the day.

In addition to the combination of talks from industry and NSA representatives, the Ashford event welcomed popular farming influencers Zoe Colville and Kriss Woodhead (known on social media as the Chief Shepherdess and the Super Serious Farmer) who spoke openly about the importance of social media for today's younger generation of farmers and its role in promoting the industry to the wider public.

NSA thanks workshop sponsors MSD Animal Health and lunch sponsors British Wool for supporting the events.



NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions are a returning favourite.

NSA Next Generation in 2023

As an ever-evolving programme, NSA Next Generation will be offering the UK's young sheep farmers more new and exciting activities as part of its two-year cycle of events, as well some returning favourites.

Plans are underway in NSA regions for NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions taking place this summer. Several will offer the opportunity for training and knowledge exchange alongside the usual competitive element, so are useful days out for anyone interested in sheep farming. They are open to all but competitors must be under 27 years old.

To ensure more young sheep enthusiasts can benefit from an NSA Next Generation activity this year, a series of events will move across the UK delivering a range of interactive day and evening sessions. Keep an eye on the NSA website for more details.

There are also plans for an event specifically for young pedigree sheep breeders, more activity around the future of wool, and much more. If you are aged 35 and under there will undoubtedly be something to inspire and educate you with NSA Next Generation this year – be sure to get involved!

NSA Next Generation Ambassadors – where are they now?



The NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme has supported almost 100 young sheep enthusiasts since its 2014 launch, proving to be a highly influential experience for those who take part.

James Davison from Ballymena, County Antrim, was one of the first young sheep farmers to benefit from the support and guidance the programme delivers. The experiences and contacts made through the programme helped him progress in his farming career.

At the time of joining the first Ambassador group in 2014, 20-year-old James was working full time on a dairy farm but was determined to grow his own business and build on his own flock of 150 ewes. Almost 10 years later, life has changed significantly.

"I've taken what opportunities have come my way," says James. "But there have been plenty of challenges I have had to overcome."

Turning point

The key turning point for James came when he entered a share farming agreement with his lifelong family friend and past NSA Chair, Samuel (Sam) Wharry.

"My road into full time farming came in 2014. I had started the NSA Next Generation programme and then Sam agreed to go into partnership with me," explains James.

Sam and James created their own share farming agreement, with some help from an accountant. Sam set up a partnership to manage his farm, renting the land to the partnership for a nominal fee. He and James worked together with their flock of 400 Scottish Blackface ewes and 70 head of cattle, making joint decisions and splitting profits at the end of each year roughly 50:50. They also diversified, adding two broiler units to the business on ground at James's small family farm.

But in May 2017, Samuel sadly died suddenly, aged just 56. James says: "When Sam died it presented a lot of challenges for us. We had an agreement but it was difficult for decisions to be made on where I then stood. It was a very sad time. I ended up taking a 40% share of the sheep but I lost the hope of farming Sam's land and, with little available at home, I had to look for more blocks of grazing."



James Davison and Samuel Wharry, pictured two years before Sam's untimely death in May 2017.

This setback would have been enough to force many to sacrifice their chance of full-time farming in their own right, but James was determined to succeed and now has a business to be proud of.

"We have built the flock up again to 600 ewes, but the system has moved from Scottish Blackface ewes that suited the hill ground I farmed with Samuel to 100% Easy Care ewes I put to a Suffolk ram, selling the lambs as stores. We are an entirely grass based system with no housing available," says James.

Although this is working well for James, limitations on ground and labour availability means this part of the business cannot grow any further.

Limitations

"I would like to keep more sheep but without securing a bigger block of ground near home it would be difficult," James explains.

Instead, James has added further enterprises to the business, including a calf rearing house, rearing around 350 calves per year and finishing 150 of these, sold on contract.

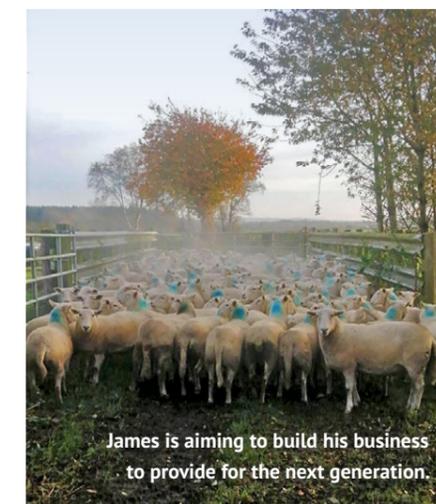
"This system is giving me security – it's a guaranteed income and will also help if we look to expand the business in some way," says James, confirming that the broiler units added during the share farming agreement continue to run successfully.

The growth of James' business is matched with that in his personal life, as he is now married with three children and a fourth on the way. James is building a family farm for the next generation.

Reflecting on how far he has come, James says: "I was effectively a first generation farmer, as my father retired from farming when I was very young. I had a lot to learn but NSA Next Generation and the guidance from Sam helped me get where I am now."

"Everything I know of sheep I learnt from Sam. We could not have anticipated his untimely death and hoped for many more years working together. But the time I spent with him gave me a great standing and confidence to do what I am doing now."

James concludes: "You never know how life will change. Looking back five years ago I would have never expected to be doing what I am now, but I made the most of my opportunities, something I'd encourage everyone to do."



James is aiming to build his business to provide for the next generation.

Perseverance and passion – essential ingredients for every sheep farmer

By Margaret Dalton, NSA Vice President

Young son in tow, we arrived at our 200 acres (80ha) of disadvantaged farmland in West Wales in 1963.

Despite costing little in today's money, the £10,000 asking price was a long way from our £500 of savings, but thanks to a very understanding bank manager, we set about making a farm business that could support our family for the future, whatever challenges came our way.

Another son followed three years later but sadly, 12 years after arriving here, my husband Don died of cancer. It was so cruel to lose him then, but this only made me more determined to succeed. I'd tell my younger self to never give up.

I have carried on his dream and now farm with my younger son John, who also runs a quad bike business. My elder son David looks after the financial side of both businesses and also runs a computer service.

Farmer's daughter

I never doubted I could do it. I was born a farmer's daughter and that was the only thing I ever wanted to do with my life. I received such support after my husband died and was never made to feel any less capable being a woman in agriculture, something of a rarity when I was younger.

We now farm 400 acres (162ha) and have installed an anaerobic digester. This was a major diversification for the farm and has helped to ensure its future for the next generation.

Investing in such ventures can be daunting. I wish I could have been told at a younger age that some ideas will not always work out and things can take time. Also that, with commitment, many

Letter to my younger self



NSA Next Generation thrives because of the enthusiasm of older NSA officeholders to share their time, expertise and advice. Sheep Farmer magazine will embrace this in 2023, asking individuals to pen a letter to their younger selves – sharing what they wish they'd known when they were starting out. The first contributor to this new series is Margaret Dalton, an NSA Vice President who has farmed at Gelligarneddau, Lampeter, Ceredigion, for the past 60 years.



Margaret promotes a never-give-up attitude to her grandchildren.

things will work but it is vital to not take your eye off the main enterprise in the meantime.

I would tell my younger self that getting stuck in with NSA was a great decision! I have enjoyed being involved and making lifelong friends. I have witnessed NSA move to the forefront of the industry and work for the future through the NSA Next Generation scheme.

My association with NSA has included work highlighting the need for legalisation of skin on sheep products, otherwise known as smokies. Little did I know when this campaigning started it would become one of the most important pieces of work I have been involved with during my farming life.

NSA continues to work tirelessly to make this trade legal and open up a massive trade for ethnic communities eager to have this type of meat from our older, preferably white-faced ewes.

My life experiences have taught me not to give up on something you feel strongly about and so I still believe we will make a breakthrough to legalise smokies, creating market opportunity and putting an end to what is currently happening in unregistered premises around the country.

Looking back

I don't think my younger self would believe me if I tried to explain the many changes I have seen in my lifetime of farming. Farms have become much bigger and mechanised. Everything has intensified but we still have the choice of more than 100 sheep breeds.

Many of the rare breeds are still in existence, and I take pride in watching them at agricultural shows – along with youngsters, including my grandsons, show their skills at sheep handling.

Our Welsh Lamb is world renowned and in 2022 we were the first UK nation to export it to the USA, trade that would never have been envisaged or indeed needed back when domestic consumption of lamb was higher.

It also feels unbelievable that we used to buy mountain store lambs for £1 per head, sell them for £6 and make a profit, compared to selling finished lambs now for more than £100 per head and struggling to make money.

I've received several awards and honours through my career, including an OBE. While I am immensely proud of these, of course I would give them all up to have lived this life for longer with my husband. My achievements would have been his and I would have been even prouder to have shared them with him.



Margaret (left) got involved with NSA when the late Lord Henry Plumb (centre) was President and John Thorley (right) was Chief Executive.

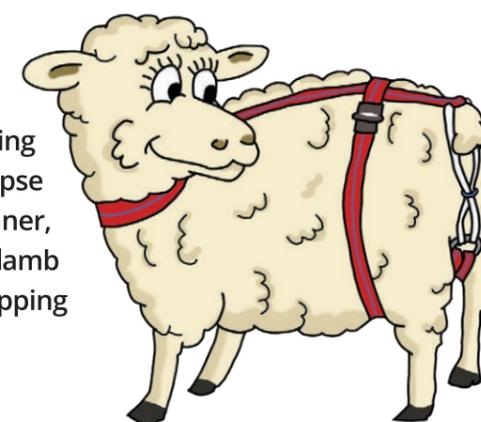
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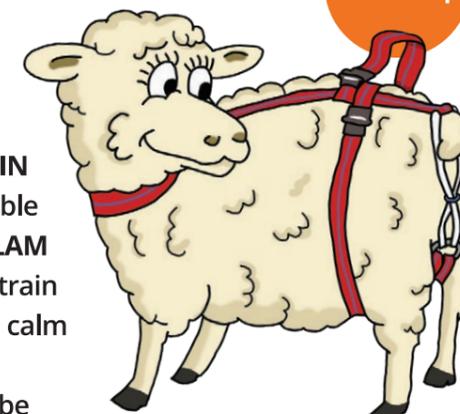


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Kim Kelly
VETERINARIAN - SOUTHLAND, NZ



"The Adlam versatile harness worked really really well, doing both prolapses and mothering on perfectly."

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FARMER APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR WORMER EXCHANGE PROGRAMME



Animal health company Elanco is looking for sheep farmers wanting to adopt use of the group 4 (AD-orange) wormer, Zolvix, to demonstrate the benefits of combatting anthelmintic resistance.

Matt Colston, Elanco technical consultant, explains the selected participants will be provided with one litre of Zolvix, following a prescription from their prescriber, and a dosing gun free of charge, as part of the Zolvix Exchange programme, along with expert advice and diagnostic support.

"We're looking for flocks of more than 500 ewes that haven't used the wormer before," he says.

The exchange programme will require farmers to monitor their flock and treat 300 lambs with Zolvix between August and September 2023 if the situation is appropriate and a prescription from their prescriber is granted.



Mr Colston says Elanco will provide support through technical management of monthly faecal egg count (FEC) results throughout the season, to assess whether wormers are required. Worm egg count results and flock production data will be collected through the season to highlight the benefits of effective worm control.

"We know anthelmintic resistance is a real problem across the UK, with research finding 98% of farms have resistance to one or more of the Group 1-3 wormers," he says.

Sustainable control

"But a recent survey shows just 19% of farms are currently following Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) advice for managing worm burdens to improve productivity and reduce the impacts of anthelmintic resistance. This includes the use of a group 4 or 5 (SI-purple) wormer for lambs, as recommended in the mid to late grazing season for lambs, and as a quarantine dose for all incoming stock.

"With input prices at an all-time high, we want to work with farmers to evidence the impact of resistance on-farm, and the benefits small changes in worm control strategies can bring," adds Mr Colston.

NSA is supporting Elanco to find sheep farmers to join the project. Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, adds: "It's imperative the whole industry works together and acts now to help meet crucial productivity targets and

slow the concerning upward trend in wormer resistance. NSA supports research working to tackle anthelmintic resistance, to maintain productivity, improve the health and welfare of the national flock and work towards future-proofing the sheep sector."

To register your interest in the Zolvix Exchange programme visit bit.ly/Zolvix-Exchange.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ZOLVIX EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

- Flock of more than 500 ewes.
- Not currently using Zolvix as a mid/late season break dose.
- Able to provide up to two years of historic information, such as lamb sales data and lamb weights.
- Have 300 lambs available between August and September 2023, to be treated with Zolvix - if deemed appropriate and prescribed by the farm vet or Registered Animal Medicine Adviser.
- Willing to carry out monthly faecal egg counts.
- Able to record and submit data by the end of 2023.

The Register of Sheep Advisers

Looking for an adviser?

Use the map to find your nearest adviser and search their specialisms. www.sheepadvisers.co.uk/About/Find-a-RoSA-Adviser

Interested in joining as an adviser?

Go to www.sheepadvisers.co.uk/join and complete the form. Your application will be reviewed against the membership criteria.



The Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) is a network of professional advisers working within the UK sheep industry.

ZOLVIX XCHANGE

Help Zolvix help you

JOIN OUR 2023 ZOLVIX EXCHANGE PROMOTION, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NSA.



Zolvix and NSA are offering farmers with 500+ ewes the opportunity to use Zolvix on their farms in 2023 so they can see the benefits of combatting anthelmintic resistance in their lambs.

WHAT IS THE THREAT?

Anthelmintic resistance is a real problem, with 98% of farms finding detectable worm resistance and 77% of farms finding resistance to two or more wormer groups (1, 2 or 3).¹

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

Not combatting this resistance affects the profitability and productivity of your farm. In one study there was a 2.8kg difference in liveweight gain (an equivalent of £9.05) and 14% reduction in carcass value compared to when a fully effective wormer is used.²

HELP ZOLVIX HELP YOU!

On signing up to the ZOLVIX XCHANGE, you will be provided 1L of Zolvix and a dosing gun, in exchange for working in partnership to combat resistance throughout 2023.

Not only will you get to try Zolvix and see the difference it makes, but you'll also get access to advice and expertise from Elanco's ruminant team, further helping you increase your farm's productivity.

SIGN UP NOW! SIMPLY SCAN THE QR CODE TO REGISTER YOUR INTEREST...

...one of the Elanco team will be in contact to discuss the requirements and your eligibility.



For further information and advice on worm resistance please visit:

www.farmanimalhealth.co.uk/wakeup



REFERENCES: 1. Wales Against Anthelmintic Resistance Development (WAARD) Final Report 2015
2. Sutherland IA et al. Veterinary Parasitology (2010) 300
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The farm has bred solely pure Swaledales for the past 20 years.

Pedigree breeder's achievements support farm and wider upland sector

By Katie James, NSA

Alan Alderson's passion for upland farming and the Swaledale breed is clear to see. His lifetime of breeding achievements and work to secure its future on behalf of the industry is evidence of his commitment.

At home on Barras Farm, sitting 5,745ft (1,750m) above sea level near Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, Alan, working alongside wife Fiona, shows no sign of slowing down his farming efforts. The farm is home to 400 pedigree Swaledale ewes running across the farm's 270 acres (110ha) of in-bye land and 346 acres (140ha) of the upland grouse moorland Alan has grazing rights on.

Despite leaving the farm for a short period in his late teens, he returned aged 23, inheriting it from his father from whom he also gained an interest in genetics.



Stewardship schemes on the grouse moor have a significant impact on Alan's farming.

Like many of the surrounding farms within the Eden valley, Barras Farm originally ran the Swaledale ewes with Bluefaced Leicester tups to produce North Country Mules. This production continued up until 2002, but after most of the Barras flock was taken out on compulsory slaughter during foot-and-mouth, Alan decided to focus purely on building numbers again by breeding the Swaledales pure.

Producing consistently high quality breeding stock is not an easy task, admits Alan.

"A good Swaledale is not easy to breed," he says. "There are colour markings to consider, correct horn placement, of course confirmation, and more to be looking for."

Breed champions

But Alan clearly has the experience and has bred champions and top priced males and females over the years.

"When I was in my early 30s, I bred the first five-figure ram ever sold of any breed, selling for £11,000 in 1978," he says. "But I always say breeding animals is like a slippery pole. You may be at the top one day, but can quickly slide back down. I now try and breed a bigger, stronger type than those more fancier looking."

The production year starts with rams running with the ewes in November. Alan invested in a top quality ram for this year's breeding season and has high expectations.

"I hope he will be a great addition to the flock. I haven't often paid a lot for tups on my own but, when I have, I've never regretted it. I hope this will be the case again," he says.

To keep lambing tight, Alan would usually leave tups in for just two cycles – but with two new rams being used this year he ran a chaser

for an extended period to cover any missed or returned ewes.

Alan jokes: "I would leave the tups in all winter but it's a contentious issue between myself and Fiona, as she likes to know when lambing is definitely finished."

Lambing is completed almost solely between Alan and Fiona outside. Ewes are always scanned.

Alan comments: "The first time there was scanning available in our area I had them scanned, many years ago now, but why would you not when it makes management of lambing so much easier?" Lambs are weaned in late August/early September and, because breeding stock from the Barras flock is in demand, most gimmer lambs are kept over winter to sell as shearlings the next year.

Less rams are sold than in previous years, something Alan puts down to fewer sheep numbers now covering areas of higher level stewardship and moorland in the uplands.

Moorland grazing

He says: "I don't enjoy having the scheme on the moor, as the sheep have to be removed from that area too early in the autumn and need to be wintered on in-bye land.

"This in turn means ewes are in too good a condition at tugging time, which has pushed the lambing percentages too high for the breed. Yes, we get more gimmers to sell, but you need increased land off the fell on which to summer the twins and triplets."

Alan sends around 250 gimmer lambs away for over wintering on dairy ground each year, but finds this increasingly hard to source.

He comments: "Traditional ground is harder to access. Dairy farmers now need it themselves

with the changing climate. Loss of winter grazing is another reason why some farmers are reducing their sheep numbers in our area."

The majority of customers buy Alan's breeding gimmers for production of Mules but some will also buy to keep their flocks pure. Although some sales are done privately direct from farm, Alan is a great supporter of the livestock market.

"I'm always pleased to sell people stock but I do like to see them buy sheep through and support the markets," he says, listing Swaledale sales at J36 Market, Skipton and Kirkby Stephen as being key for him.

All wether lambs are fattened on farm and sold deadweight or liveweight, mostly to local auction marts. Alan comments: "Prices were disappointing this year. The market seemed to demand the heavier export lambs again. But with the price for feed needed at this time of year, profit is marginal for hill lambs."

Supermarkets

An option for Swaledale breeders to try and get a premium price for their stock in recent years has been the Marks & Spencer Swaledale lamb scheme, which Alan was instrumental in the development of during his 18 years as Chair of the Swaledale Sheep Society.

"The scheme offers a good additional price per head, sold as a speciality product. This shows our breed can be produced to the required specification for a high-class supermarket," says Alan.

A further achievement of Alan's was his role as an advisor to the national scrapie plan. Alan explains: "The Swaledale Society spent time testing rams to determine the breed's scrapie status ahead of the scheme. This put us in an informed position with knowledge on what the groups of scrapie genotypes actually meant. Our experience allowed me to help advise on which animals really were susceptible and resulted in many sheep being kept in the national flock that would of otherwise been lost."

He continues: "Those were some of my most important days during my involvement with the breed society. At the time we had other breeds disagreeing with what we were saying but we were working for the good of the wider sheep sector, not individual breeds."

Alan also spent time with the late John Dowson, on behalf of the Swaledales, promoting the breed to Northern and Southern Ireland, work that continues to this day, resulting in the breed now having more than 80 registered members in those countries.

Alan is clearly proud of these achievements, accomplishments recognised with him being presented with the NSA Northern Region T.I Allison award for outstanding contribution to the sheep industry in the north of England.



Alan has always been a passionate Swaledale breeder.

“Representing the North of England and its many sheep producers [on the NSA Board] is something to take pride in.”

Alan Alderson

Alan first became involved with NSA through his involvement with the Swaledales and is now Trustee for NSA Northern Region. He says: "When I retired from the breed society I was asked to join the NSA Board of Trustees. Representing the north of England and its many sheep producers is something to take pride in."

As part of the NSA Board, Alan is encouraged by the younger members' enthusiasm for the sector – but admits he's concerned for the future of sheep farming in the uplands.

He says: "The Basic Payment Scheme has meant hill farmers can afford to run their flocks but, once that is stopped, it will be difficult to make a profit. Higher level stewardship is set to continue for a while, which will provide a buffer. But those used to receiving both will find it difficult to make good returns when the single payment stops."

Tenant farmers

"It is the tenanted farms I really worry about. There are young people who want to farm livestock but are finding it necessary financially to have a part time job too. Farming hill livestock is not a part time job. Stock needs to be cared for 24/7, a subject I feel very strongly about."

Although Alan has children and grandchildren, there will be no successor at Barras Farm. "Sadly we will be the last generation of the Alderson family to farm here. My children and grandchildren are not interested in farming as a career."

"And although the number of Swaledale breeders is currently static, with smaller flocks, again because of pressures to reduce numbers on the hills, I do hope some local younger farmers will be keen to take on our land when the time comes for us to retire."

But despite plans to reduce numbers slightly, Alan is not ready to hand over his crook just yet – and will surely continue to be a voice for the Swaledale and upland farming for some years to come.

"Native hill sheep breeds are the bedrock of British hill farming and should be valued. They are the caretakers of the hills and mountains of Britain, and much admired throughout the world," he concludes.



Farm facts

- 400 pedigree Swaledale ewes across 270 acres (110ha) of in-bye land and 346 acres (140ha) of the upland grouse moorland.
- Gimmer lambs kept on and sold as shearling ewes through local breeding sales.
- Alan is the previous Chair of the Swaledale Sheep Breeders Association and an NSA Trustee, nominated by NSA Northern Region.

Quad bike helmet giveaway promotes improved farm safety



Five safety-conscious sheep farmers will be better protected following an NSA membership giveaway at the end of last year.

Members may have read in NSA Sheep Farmer magazine and via other NSA communications of the chance to win a free helmet as part of its work to encourage improved safety when using all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), often a vital piece of farm machinery for sheep farmers.

To win a chance to receive the prize, members were invited to explain what steps individuals can take to make sheep farming safer. Among the successful applicants was Joe Black from Whitchurch, Shropshire.



NSA promotes wearing a helmet as standard practice when operating an ATV.

Attitude shift

Joe said: "Farmers need to move on from the 'it'll be alright' attitude and pay attention to fatality statistics. About 50% of recent fatalities have been due to livestock, and although this probably relates to cattle and public access, we should all be learning lessons from these stats.

"Engaging with children that live on farms at an early age is important, teaching them about the industry without putting them in danger and explaining to them why we do things the way we do, so we are safe. Also, with machinery purchases, we should all be considering safety features as a key factor as well as considering retro-fit safety features."

Another lucky winner, Joshua Bevan from Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, was keen to highlight the importance of wearing helmets. He said: "Individuals and the wider industry need

to start taking extra precautions with wider use of helmets and other appropriate personal protective equipment.

"Communication also needs to be improved when working alone, ensuring someone knows where you are and a better understanding of apps that can help people find you if you need help. These are important."

Pro helmet

In his entry, Graham Powell from Brecon, Powys, said: "Most have heard of someone who has had an accident on a quad but think it will never happen to them." While not a user of a helmet before the competition, Graham has become a regular and proud user of his protective prize.

The past year has seen several fatalities reported due to ATV accidents, tragedies that may have been

preventable if protective helmets were worn. Through this giveaway, NSA's own promotion and its support of the Farm Safety Partnership and similar initiatives, NSA actively promotes the wearing of helmets when operating an ATV and will continue to work hard to make it normal practice.

When entering the competition several winners were also keen to explain their reasons for being a member of NSA. Gert Van Dyke from Invergordon in the Scottish Highlands said: "I value NSA membership as it helps me stay up to date with changes and news from the industry." Jayne Harkness-Bones from Crumlin, County Antrim, added: "I feel part of a group of like-minded folk through my NSA membership."

For further information on NSA's joint work with the Farm Safety Partnership, visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-the-farm-safety-partnership.

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2023 outlook: opportunities and threats for the year ahead

Several seasons of good sheep prices have brought confidence to the sector, reflected in Defra's June 2022 survey data showing the breeding sheep flock up 1% on the year and ewes intended for first time breeding up 5%.

But late last year and into January, prices were down around 10% on the year and there is evidence of some disappointment with current prices as the full effects of higher costs are now being felt.

Rising input costs, winter fodder shortages following drought in 2022, and attractive cull ewe prices may mean the size of the flock come spring 2023 could in fact show a marginal decrease.

A further effect of drought and lack of grass growth last year may be reduced lambing percentages in the year ahead with a proportion of the flock entering the breeding season in less-than-ideal condition and high concentrate costs likely to limit supplementary feeding to boost the body condition of leaner ewes.

Meat prices

At least the outlook for sheep meat prices in 2023 remains generally positive. Domestic demand will undoubtedly come under pressure in the year ahead due to the cost-of-living crisis, as lamb is seen as an expensive meat. But EU and worldwide supplies remain tight and demand from the key export markets of the EU, Asia and US firm. This will hopefully offset, at least to some degree, any reduction in demand and help underpin the price.

On the import side, New Zealand and Australian exporters continue to target Asian markets that are closer to them geographically and, to date, have offered good returns with lower freight costs than those incurred when exporting to the EU and UK.

Low levels of competition from imports have undoubtedly helped drive UK prices upwards, but there are some signs of a slowing in Chinese demand. In addition, these markets are not always the most stable. Non-economic trade barriers, for example, can be introduced with little or no warning.

Having left the EU, domestic agricultural and environmental policy looks likely to have a significant effect on the size and structure of the UK sheep flock going forward. This may be seen most immediately in England with the Basic Payment Scheme being phased out and replaced by new environmental schemes that are likely to favour lower stocking densities – but the devolved nations will likely follow suit at varying speeds.

The sheep sector has been heavily supported for many years, with various payment schemes available to producers. Very soon the sector will become fully exposed to the returns it can generate from the market for the first time, bringing a focus on commerciality that more traditional producers have been able to avoid to date.

One effect could be a continued shift away from the traditional and unique stratified three-tiered breeding structure that has existed in the UK for many years.

The first tier based on the high hills and pure hill breeds, for example Blackface, Swaledale and Welsh Mountain, looks likely to come under the most pressure once direct support is removed

By David Siddle, Andersons **ANDERSONS**

and because this land is being targeted for its environmental and carbon offsetting value as opposed to sheep farming.

On the middle ground, where draft or regular aged ewes traditionally produce crossbred ewe lambs for the lowlands, some more progressive businesses are already replacing these flocks with ones producing finished lambs. They are often based on composite breeds and utilise performance recording, pasture improvement, modern grazing techniques, outdoor lambing, low labour and machinery costs and rigorous selection policies. Many of these flocks can report impressive financial returns as compared with the average.

Replacements

On the low ground we see more flocks moving away from the reliance on purchasing replacement crossbred ewe lambs and gimmers to closed flocks involving fewer animal movements and opportunities to spread disease.

The use of homebred replacements of known disease status and the ability to select both male and female stock for commercial traits such as ease of lambing, longevity, milk production, backfat depth, birthweights, lamb growth rates and disease resistance can bring significant economic benefit.

There is much talk of the integration of sheep in particular into more regenerative farming systems, while there are undoubtedly a few more sheep appearing on arable farms. But the majority of the UK flock will remain in the uplands or based on permanent pasture and long term leys, where there are still significant opportunities to improve performance to help offset reducing levels of support.

St Andrews Day campaign promotes Scottish lamb sales



Scottish auction markets are looking forward to another buoyant year following a positive 2022, says the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS).

Despite several headwinds, auctioneers remain optimistic on the demand for Scottish sheep, both prime and breeding.

Neil Wilson, IAAS Executive Director, comments: "It was pleasing the auction system continued as the key marketing outlet for sheep producers last year, with its open price discovery system offering a fair way for willing buyers and sellers to determine the value of an animal.

"Despite efforts by others in the industry to talk prices down in their favour the auction ring remains an important component when it comes to identifying the true value of stock."

IAAS once again supported the sheep sector by running its highly successful Lamb for St Andrews Day campaign across the autumn months, culminating in the main event, the cooking of lamb to celebrate Scotland's patron saint in late November.

Promoting lamb

Over the past three years IAAS has led this campaign alongside Scottish Craft Butchers, QMS, NSA Scottish Region and other industry stakeholders, resulting in more than 62,000 Scottish school children cooking and eating lamb in school cookery classes.

The campaign has been recognised in the Scottish Parliament and become one of Scotland's key lamb promotion events.

"IAAS has been grateful for the support of farmers and its auctioneer members who generate donations, supporting further our Lamb Bank to promote lamb in schools.

"The long term vision is future generations of customers cooking and eating lamb at a young age, when they are susceptible to the negative marketing of red meat," continues Mr Wilson.

"By promoting lamb and sheep meat products at a time when there is a seasonal rise in supply, we stimulate demand and create a short-term gain for the industry. The benefit of this is that we can support farmgate prices through the auction ring at this time of year."

Market price analysis shows the campaign plays a critical part in improving liveweight lamb

prices in Scotland during the month of November (see graph), demonstrating how a whole industry getting behind a focused campaign can help promote product and support prices at a critical time of the year.

"Looking forward to 2023 we can all agree the sheep sector faces some real headwinds," Mr Wilson says. "We all understand the pressures of input costs on the whole industry – from farmgate to live ring and beyond. This will take careful management and a focus on making sure every pound spent is well invested on farm."

Import challenges

This year also begins with concerns about New Zealand lamb appearing on shelves, which Mr Wilson says may put downward pressure on sheep prices throughout spring.

"The usual excuses have appeared about lamb being out of season in the UK after Christmas. The harsh reality is UK producers have to find a way of promoting their own product values over those of imported produce, whether we agree with imports or not," adds Mr Wilson.

"Because the cost-of-living crisis makes cheaper produce attractive to consumers, it is crucial we all strive to maximise our outputs versus costs and inputs.

"Easier said than done, but a focus on cost management and, I believe, using the live ring to maximise product value is vital – especially as there is no additional support coming our way from any of the UK governments."

Mr Wilson shares the view that numbers coming forward later in 2023 may be tighter.

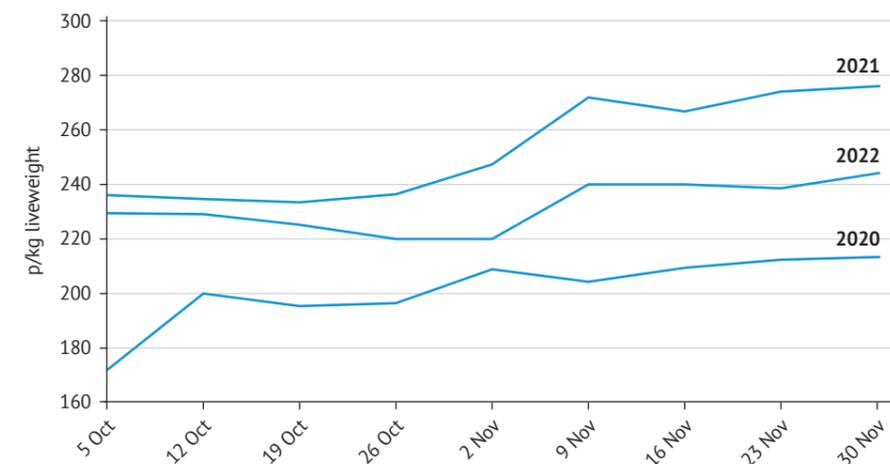


Lambing percentages may be adversely impacted by the challenging weather seen last year. There are also concerns around campaigns promoting tree planting ahead of livestock farming across the UK, especially in Scotland. This puts sheep farming in direct competition with tree planting, and given the money offered on trees from private and government sources, suggests sheep farming could lose out.

Mr Wilson concludes: "While we all need to take climate change and the environment seriously, the current direction of travel spells danger for the rural community. IAAS will continue to campaign for the right tree in the right place and to protect rural communities and red meat production in these areas.

"However, it does appear, in the short term at least, we will continue to see downward pressure on breeding stock numbers, meaning it's reasonable to predict British sheep meat supplies will remain tight as we head into the second half of 2023."

Weekly average prime SSQ lambs weighing 25.5-45.5kg at Scottish auctions (Source: IAAS).



Wool Month elevated the wool message



British Wool is celebrating the success of its Wool Month promotional campaign, which raised consumer awareness of the benefits and sustainability of wool products.

Through a series of events across October 2022, British Wool worked with more brands than previous campaigns to host press events and launch new products and retail activity to spread the wool message to consumers.

Events with Woolroom and Harris Tweed, two of British Wool's largest licensees, in partnership with the Campaign for Wool, targeted the mainstream press and saw celebrity endorsement.

Graham Clark of British Wool reports: "The events attracted a high level of press coverage, helping to spread the British wool message to a wide range of consumers at a crucial time of year for wool product sales."

Raising profile

The event with Woolroom was headed by ex-BBC presenter Louise Minchin and highlighted the benefits of sleeping under wool for women going through the menopause.

"This tied in with October also being Menopause Month. Louise has been very vocal about this issue and was an ideal spokesperson," says Mr Clark.

"For the Harris Tweed event a short film was produced highlighting the community, provenance and transparency aspects of the brand. A press event held in Covent Garden to officially launch the film also gained widespread coverage."

British Wool also used Wool Month to launch its 'What on Earth are you wearing?' campaign.

Mr Clark explains: "The idea for this came from consumer research exploring the buying habits of consumers. The campaign highlights the perils of fast fashion and how British wool garments can be one of the solutions to this highly publicised issue."

Press coverage

"The campaign has already secured a high degree of press coverage, including articles in the Telegraph and Daily Star, enabling us to push the wool message across diverse consumer audiences."

Wool Month also saw the launch of several new products from British Wool licensees, including Slumberdown and Snuggledown duvets, Crucial Trading, Kingsmead and Brockway carpets, Navy Grey and jumpers from the high street retailer Next.

"This product development is key as we strive to create new demand for British wool in the consumer arena," says Mr Clark.



Louise Minchin is one celebrity endorsing wool products.

Republic of Ireland looking to emulate British Wool

As an outcome of a visit with the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), British Wool has been further highlighting the role it plays in the UK to use collective marketing to improve prices.

Representatives from IFA in the Republic of Ireland, along with a delegation from the Ulster Farmers Union in Northern Ireland, visited British Wool's headquarters in Bradford, West Yorkshire, to compare approaches to marketing wool.

British Wool has shared comments made by IFA about the benefits a coordinated approach has brought for farmers members in the UK, with British wool typically trading 'well above' prices in the Republic of Ireland because of the structures in place.

First steps

IFA is keen to see a similar organisation established on its side of the Irish Sea, to develop a brand for Irish Wool. As a first step, the Department for Agriculture, Food and the Marine has committed €30,000 to help establish a wool council.

Andrew Hogley of British Wool says the co-operative principles it operates by enable UK sheep farmers to benefit from economies of scale.

"We believe working together is the way forward," he says. "British Wool is the only organisation that collects, grades and sells all wool on behalf of UK sheep farmers. We still have work to do to generate demand and raise prices further, as our number one aim remains to return the best price to our farmer members."

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Natalie Ingman
TNGB Key Accounts Manager & Sheep Farmer



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Flock health: why animal wellbeing is a valuable asset

A team approach to flock health is an area of work where QMS is supporting SRUC to find innovative ways to make health risk management more effective, time efficient and visible.

The joint initiative is asking livestock farmers how much value they place on the health of their flock and encouraging them to see it as a key asset in its own right – like farm buildings, machinery, land and stock.

Making the most of animal health might mean changing the way we manage it, says Tim Geraghty, SRUC vet.

He comments: "Stock health is a valuable asset. The difference between things going well or having a difficult year can be worth £90 per ewe, so there's a huge financial swing possible in how well we manage sheep health in the next 12 months.

"It is a valuable but fragile asset, a bit like a big glass ball which is worth a lot of money but can easily be dropped."

Optimal health

While he says it's difficult to consistently achieve optimal health, it is always possible to strive for it. Doing this well will reduce risks and increase gains, even in more difficult years.

Mr Geraghty suggests the key to safeguarding a farm's stock health asset revolves round a few straightforward steps.

- **Create a team** with you, whoever else works with your stock on farm, your vet, nutritionist and any other consultants you use. Bring together everybody who has a role in managing your animal health asset over the next 12 months and get them all working together.
- **Be proactive.** Working with your team, set targets you want to achieve using actual

numbers – not percentages – such as average lamb weaning weights you are aiming for. Try to cover animal survival, growth rates and fertility.

"Stick the agreed targets somewhere you'll see them every day. Once you've set targets and they're visible, your attention will always be drawn to how to achieve them," he says.

- **Manage immediate risks** by having a 'banana skin' meeting every three or four months with your team. Think about what might go wrong and look at possible failures before they happen.

"Every farm will have its own risk profile, so think about those banana skins and what you can do to stop them happening. It could be anything from improving a building's air flow, using a new vaccine, or grooving some slippery concrete. They should be things you and the team can do in the next few weeks to reduce risks and safeguard the health asset," Mr Geraghty adds.

- **Monitor your progress.** Check how you are doing, compare this with your targets and write it down.

"Do this every quarter so you are building up a picture over the year, and at the end of every cycle or season, review it. We will often miss our targets, as we are ambitious and farming is difficult.

"Don't get too hung-up on whether you have achieved the targets or not. Focus on being able to answer the questions, did you hit your targets, and if not, why not? If you know this, you will know so much more about your business risk profile going forward. It will be an ongoing process of learning, refinement and improvement," he says.

Mr Geraghty suggests using farm management software or an app to make it quicker and easier to manage the health risk on-farm effectively. He says: "It's a central point where the farm's

team can collaborate and proactively do things in an efficient way."

Bruce McConachie of QMS says: "The importance of health planning can often be overlooked when it comes to the wellbeing of livestock enterprises. But a few practical steps can really help safeguard stock health and make managing any potential problems much easier.

"For QMS, health planning is a topic being discussed at length as there's opportunity for the sector to really make progress and enjoy the financial benefits. It's vital farm teams work together to carry out best practice, monitor activity and build on results – so we can start to see positive changes to the industry in 2023."



Effective health risk management goals

- Better business resilience.
- Reduced medicine use.
- Lower environmental footprint.
- Better animal welfare.
- Improved financial performance.
- Better mental health.
- Better work-life balance.



Health and welfare recommendations for a successful lambing



After the drought in 2022, shortages of toxoplasmosis vaccine, Spectam product discontinuation and the potential risk of reduced availability and high cost of iodine, there are concerns for lambing time.

But according to Dr Miranda Bowden-Doyle of AHDB, nutrition pre-lambing, high hygiene status and colostrum could be the solution.

"Forage quality always varies year on year and between cuts, but the hot and dry conditions of 2022 led to low soil moisture and therefore reduced grass yield, reduced forage quality and lower protein and energy content," she says. "Lower forage quality and quantity could have knock-on effects on ewe BCS, at tupping, lambing and beyond. Anecdotal reports of lower BCS because of the poorer forage are circulating."

Body condition

Dr Bethan John manages the AHDB Challenge Sheep project. She comments: "We encourage proactive monitoring of ewe BCS ahead of lambing. Nutrition, especially around lambing, is vital. Target ewe BCS should be 3.5 for lowland breeds, 3.0 for upland and 2.5 for hill. Maintaining appropriate BCS is one of the most important tools to ensure success at lambing and beyond."

Ewe BCS, along with the right balance of energy and protein, is key to positive pregnancy and lambing outcomes. As well as a lower scanning rate, low ewe BCS could cause lower lamb birthweight, poorer lamb vigour, reduced colostrum quality and quantity and, ultimately, decrease lamb survival.

To combat these risks, Dr Bowden-Doyle suggests understanding the quality of your forage.

"Forage analysis will help establish if ewes need supplementation," she says. "Ask your vet to collect blood samples for metabolic profiling three to four weeks pre-lambing to assess nutrition status in late pregnancy, allowing corrections to deficiencies or excesses."

Using forage analysis, blood tests, scanning data and BCS collectively to split ewes into groups according to their needs will aid management at lambing time.



"Ewe lambs and shearlings are still growing, so if you are breeding from them you should manage them separately and by litter size, as they need 20% more nutrition compared to mature ewes," adds Dr Bowden-Doyle.

"Hygiene and colostrum are important areas to focus on for a successful lambing. The shortage of toxoplasmosis vaccine pre-tupping last year could lead to more barren ewes due to early foetal loss or increased risk of abortion due to toxoplasmosis for some flocks.

"Since one vaccination usually gives lifelong immunity, replacements not previously vaccinated are at greatest risk. Additionally, if you have a low scanning percentage, you should consider toxoplasmosis as a potential cause."

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a microscopic parasite and not spread from ewe to ewe or through aborted materials. It is spread by infected cats through their faeces. Any on-farm cats should be kept away from ewes and feed.

All abortion storms should be investigated and any ewes who abort immediately isolated. Aborted materials need to be destroyed quickly and pregnant ewes kept away from the area. If lambing indoors, the lambing pen must be thoroughly disinfected before subsequent use.

Watery mouth

"The discontinuation of Spectam last year and the subsequent shortage changed the way watery mouth is managed. It's a good idea to discuss with your vet how you plan to manage any cases before lambing starts," says Dr Bowden-Doyle.

According to the Sheep Veterinary Society (SVS), production of iodine in Chile has stopped, leading to reduced availability and high cost as the price quadruples. While navel dressing is important, most cases of joint ill and other bacterial diseases arise from a contaminated environment, again demonstrating the importance of hygiene.

SVS says iodine preparations below 7% are less effective and the use of antibiotic sprays as an alternative is not acceptable. A list of alternatives to iodine are available on the SVS website but comes with a warning that data is limited on the use of such alternatives in lambs.

Dr Bowden-Doyle says the two most effective tools to combat watery mouth and joint ill are hygiene and adequate intake of good quality colostrum. Colostrum provides nutrition and the vital antibodies that form lambs' immune systems during the first weeks of life.

More on investigating abortions on page 40, colostrum management on pages 46 & 48, and joint ill on page 50.

Take-home tips

- Use forage analysis and blood tests to check nutrition is adequate in late pregnancy.
- Target BCS is 3.5 for lowland, 3.0 for upland and 2.5 for hill breeds.
- Maximise hygiene and ensure all staff are familiar with your lambing protocol.
- Remember the three Qs of colostrum management – quality, quantity, quickly.

Extra consideration is needed pre-lambing due to unforeseen circumstances in 2022.



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Research suggests BCS can be used to identify ewes most likely to pass out a lot worm eggs around lambing time.



Practical steps for reducing wormer use in ewes at lambing

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



As the incidence of anthelmintic resistance continues to increase across UK sheep farms, the need to only use wormers when necessary is becoming more and more important.

One way to do this is by understanding the rationale behind the worming of ewes and ways to safely reduce the proportion treated around lambing time.

The reason we worm ewes around lambing is often misunderstood and normally has nothing to do with the health of the ewe. The real reason is that the ewe's immune system can wane under the stress of late pregnancy, allowing adult worms in their gut to produce more eggs. This is known as the peri-parturient rise.

These eggs are passed out in the ewe's dung, contaminating pasture that is then grazed by

their lambs later in the season. The objective of the wormer at lambing is to reduce the level of pasture contamination and the subsequent challenge to lambs.

Unfortunately, lambing coincides with a time of year when a relatively high proportion of the worm population is likely to be inside the ewe's gut, rather than on pasture. This means, when we worm ewes, the selection pressure for resistance on the worm population is high. The fewer ewes treated, the lower the selection pressure for resistance.

For some years, SCOPS has recommended at least one in 10 of the fittest ewes are left untreated to mitigate this effect, but as resistance levels increase, we need to further reduce the proportion treated.

Innovative research

Evidence is building to support the case for a significant reduction in the proportion of ewes wormed around lambing time, without detrimental effects on lamb performance. The key is determining which ewes need to be wormed, for example those producing the highest number of eggs in their dung, and to select the best time to give them any treatment.

A recent project in Wales has spent three seasons looking at the peri-parturient rise of ewes on five commercial sheep farms (see graphs). On farm 1 the peri-parturient rise occurs before lambing. Based on individual BCS, just 50% of this mob were treated at lambing, which resulted in the mob FEC falling quickly after lambing. In contrast, farm 2 has a peri-parturient rise after lambing at lower FEC counts. If they are to treat, then those ewes losing BCS in early lactation would be the targets.

Careful monitoring of FECs has shown there is significant variation in terms of the extent, timing and duration of the peri-parturient rise, both between individual ewes and between farms. Nutritional stress, measured as a loss of BCS, was the key to establishing which ewes had the highest FEC and when this occurred relative to lambing.

Targeted treatment

But what does this mean in practice? From a practical perspective it means, rather than just leaving the fittest or single rearing ewes untreated, you can use loss of body condition in your ewes to identify those under the most nutritional stress and therefore more likely to produce a high number of eggs in their dung.

In many flocks this will mean you can reduce the proportion treated. For example, farm 1 in the graphs only treated 37-50% of their ewes during the project. Using mob FEC monitoring would also help understand when egg output is rising, so treatment can be timed more accurately.

In recent years there has been concern over the blanket use of long-acting moxidectin 2% wormers in ewes and the impact this has on anthelmintic resistance. While these products do reduce egg output over an extended period, and therefore can reduce pasture contamination, it also means the worm population is exposed to the active for longer.

Taking this new approach means we can target only those ewes likely to produce the most contamination, harnessing the potential of moxidectin, while ensuring minimum selection pressure is exerted.

More information on treatment choices at www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/worms/choosing-a-product.



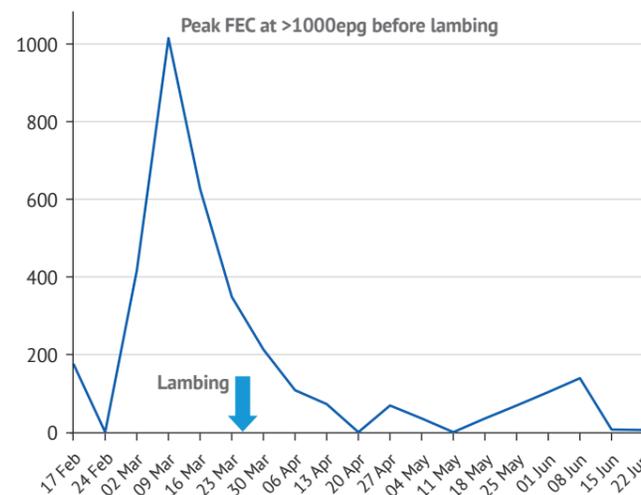
New monitoring methods can reduce the amount of wormer needed.

To worm or not to worm?

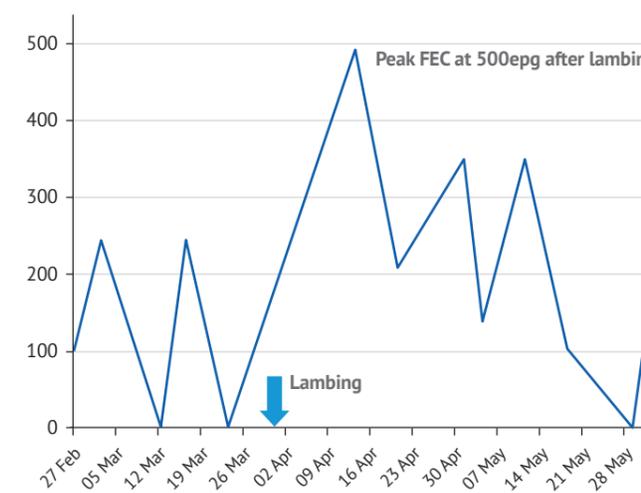
- It is increasingly important to minimise the proportion of ewes wormed around lambing.
- The objective of worming ewes around lambing is to reduce the amount of contamination on pasture.
- Identifying which ewes produce most contamination is key to reducing the proportion of ewes treated.
- There is a huge variation in FEC between ewes, and recent work supports a loss in BCS as the key indicator of ewes with the highest egg output.
- Monitoring BCS allows you to identify which ewes to treat, leaving a higher proportion untreated.
- Combined with some FEC monitoring, you can also pinpoint the time to give a treatment for maximum effect.
- There is scope to significantly reduce the proportion of ewes wormed.

Mob faecal egg counts on two farms.

Farm 1



Farm 2



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Productivity can be improved by understanding abortions.

Investigating abortions is key to the plan-protect-prevent approach

Abortions in sheep are sadly not uncommon, often having a significant impact on production and taking an emotional toll on farmers.

Investigating abortions is vital, as understanding the cause can potentially reduce further losses and help prepare for the next lambing season.

Pregnancy scanning provides an estimate of the lambs anticipated but an abortion storm can decimate those predictions. APHA data shows *Chlamydia abortus*, the cause of enzootic abortion, and toxoplasma are the most commonly diagnosed. Other causes include campylobacter, listeria, salmonella and border disease.

So how are abortions diagnosed? Ideally both the lamb and placenta should be sent for examination, because some diseases require a placenta to perform tests on. A full history surrounding the abortion event is also helpful to understand how the disease may have entered the flock.

APHA routinely subjects the foetus and placenta to a range of tests looking for specific diseases. This also provides surveillance information as, for example, all lambs are tested for brucella to provide evidence of a brucella free nation, enabling us to trade with other countries.

All lambs or samples taken from aborted lambs are tested for enzootic abortion, toxoplasmosis, campylobacter, border disease, Q fever and, if suspected, Schmallenberg disease.

Further testing

Having the lamb and placenta provides additional material that can be subjected to further testing, for example histopathology, if a cause is not immediately found.

In some cases, a private vet may take the samples from the aborted lamb and send those samples to APHA. Providing there is a full range of samples, APHA will carry out the full range of tests (see table).

Some diseases can appear obvious. For example, a placenta from a lamb that has aborted with

enzootic abortion has a characteristic red inflamed appearance, while campylobacter can cause characteristic pale circular lesions in the liver. However sometimes there can be more than one cause of abortion.

In some cases no diagnosis can be made, which can be very frustrating. There are several possible reasons for this.

- If one lamb has been sent it might not be typical of the incident and further lambs should be sent for investigation.
- The lamb sent in was too decomposed to allow testing to be carried out. Some lambs are mummified or completely rotten and it can be difficult to isolate pathogens from them.
- If samples have been taken on farm, they might not be the full set required to undertake all tests. On other occasions they might be contaminated with environmental bacteria making it difficult to identify specific causal bacteria.



By Amanda Carson, APHA



Placentas from enzootic abortion lambs are typically red and inflamed in appearance.



Campylobacter characteristically causes lesions on the liver.

Where the full range of tests have been carried out, investigation can determine the cause or causes of abortion. It can also identify diseases that are not present, providing peace of mind.

Event history

The cause of abortion is not always an infective agent, as problems can also result from poor management - which is why a good history of the event is important. If ewes are also dying, then having a post mortem examination carried out on a dead aborted ewe can be helpful. It's also worth bearing in mind abortion can be caused by poor condition, trace element deficiencies, liver fluke and tick borne fever.

When abortion strikes, identifying the cause is key to being able to take effective steps. You can't assume a twisted lamb (arthrogryposis) has Schmallenberg. It could be something else, perhaps even something new. For example, APHA identified the first case of neospora causing arthrogryposis in the UK.

The ethos of plan, protect, prevent allows meaningful discussions between a farmer and vet to take place once a diagnosis has been reached. Biosecurity, nutrition and vaccination considerations can then be incorporated into a flock health plan as appropriate to the cause.

Tests carried out by APHA.

Sample	Test	Cause of abortion tested for
Placenta, including multiple cotyledons and intercotyledonary membrane	Gross examination for placentitis and stained smear	Chlamydia (enzootic abortion of ewes), coxiella (Q Fever) and brucella
	PCR	<i>Toxoplasma gondii</i> , chlamydia, coxiella
Foetal stomach contents collected aseptically via a syringe and needle or with a vacutainer	Bacteriology	Bacterial causes including campylobacter species and salmonella, fungal infections
Foetal fluid from thoracic or abdominal cavity	Antibody iFAT	<i>Toxoplasma gondii</i>
Fresh spleen/thymus	PCR	Border disease
Fresh liver	Additional bacteriology	Bacterial causes including campylobacter species
Fresh brain	PCR	Schmallenberg virus
	Antibody Elisa	Schmallenberg virus
	Serum (red top)	<i>Toxoplasma gondii</i>
Maternal blood	Serum (red top)	Border disease

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Colostrum is key to lamb survival.

Can management practices reduce the need for antibiotics at lambing time?

By Mark Thompson, Craven Farm Vets



Antibiotics and wormers have been revolutionary products, improving livestock health and welfare and allowing more intensive sheep farming methods.

But overuse has led to and will continue to lead to resistance, potentially rendering these products unviable. Acting now to use medicines more responsibly will give them a longer lasting usefulness in the future.

Lambing is always an area to focus on. Ewes are often stocked more tightly and even housed, they

are metabolically stressed due to pregnancy and, in some cases, disturbed from a difficult lambing.

Meanwhile lambs have no functioning immune system and limited energy reserves in what can be a bacteria-laden environment, if sanitary measures are not followed. In these scenarios, it's easy to see why antibiotics are commonly used at this time of year and, unfortunately, can be tempting to over-use.

Colostrum

Colostrum management is the biggest factor in maximising lamb health and reducing the reliance of antibiotics at lambing time. It is full of energy, antibodies, lactoferrins, cytokines and hormones, all of which are vital for short and medium-term lamb health.

A lamb that quickly acquires a good quantity of quality colostrum has received the best start in life and, in most cases, will have no need for supplementation or antibiotics.

Ewe health and nutrition is the key to colostrum quality and quantity, while the intake of colostrum is supported by viable lambs that rapidly get up to suck.

Parasite burdens (such as fluke or scab) will affect colostrum quality so need to be controlled if present. Lameness is painful and affects food intake so it is important to keep this to a minimum by rapid treatment of any cases and vaccination if appropriate.

Iceberg diseases such as maedi visna, Johnes, borders disease and ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma can all impact on ewe and lamb health in different ways so it is useful to know the flock status. Your vet can support with protection and control of these diseases during health planning.

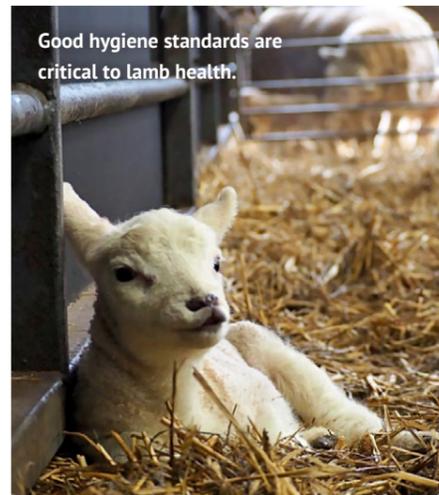
Nutrition and body condition are related and also need to be planned well in advance of lambing. Protein and energy requirements vary depending upon the number of lambs a ewe is carrying and stage of pregnancy. Minerals, vitamins and trace elements are also important and all need balancing to optimise ewe health, immunity and lamb viability.

Forage

Forage analysis, including minerals, is vital knowledge to help balance up energy and protein in the diet and address any specific mineral deficiencies. The better the forage the less concentrates required. BCS should be done throughout the year with the aim of levelling-up the flock in the period between weaning and tugging to better manage ewes as a group.

Ewes can be separated into groups in the last third of pregnancy depending upon body condition and/or number of lambs scanned, allowing different groups to be fed accordingly.

Continued overleaf.



Good hygiene standards are critical to lamb health.

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▶ As lambing approaches, it is worthwhile blood sampling a few ewes for a nutrition profile to provide reassurance the diet is adequate and/or highlight any deficiencies, such as low protein or energy. Doing this pre-lambing gives time for these to be corrected prior to lambing. Again, your vet should be able to help with this.

Ensure vaccination of ewes is up to date. A clostridial vaccine will help reduce neonatal clostridial diseases such as lamb dysentery, which can have a similar appearance to watery mouth. Footrot vaccination will help to control footrot, which significantly affects ewe health and dietary intakes.

Hygiene

Cleanliness during lambing needs to be a cornerstone of management. Any bacteria ingested by a lamb in the first hours of life will prevent its ability to absorb the vital constituents of colostrum. In essence there is a race between getting colostrum into the lamb and bacteria establishing itself in the gut.

When lambing outside there is far less risk of infections unless tightly stocked or bad weather drives all animals towards shelter. Inside lambing is more controlled but comes with a higher risk of infection spread.

Using plenty of bedding will help keep moisture levels down and keep bacteria levels on the surface as low as possible. This helps keep bellies and udders clean. Environmental drying agents and disinfectants such as lime may also help. It is also vital feeding equipment such as feeding tubes and lamb bottles are regularly cleaned and periodically sterilised.

Colostrum supplementation for lambs is sometimes required. The volume required varies between lambs with some needing a top up and others a complete feed. The goal is for a lamb to have 50ml/kg of colostrum within three hours of birth.

Ideally the colostrum should be sourced from a freshly lambed ewe, which may have been collected fresh or been stored in the freezer.



Concentrating on ewe health can reduce medicine use at lambing.

There are other sources of colostrum all with pros and cons to be discussed with your vet.

Supplementation

If considering powdered colostrum it is worth noting the quality of these products vary between brands so it pays to get advice and shop around. The stated doses of powdered colostrum are only a guidance for top-ups and a higher volume is required where there is the need for complete replacement.

Quality of fresh colostrum can be assessed using a brix refractometer, which is a relatively cheap instrument and gives a rapid pen side reading. Even better is to blood test a few lambs for antibodies. This assesses the process of

colostrum transfer, from quality to absorption. It gives reassurance the process is working or shows there is a problem.

Good nutrition, flock management and an emphasis on colostrum and cleanliness running up to and around lambing will help minimise the reliance on antibiotics, which should only be used where there is a known problem.

Each year circumstances change, as the health and nutrition of the flock will vary and the weather will play its part. The aim each year should be to prepare well in advance for lambing and to use no antibiotics - but to consult and work with your vet should diseases rear their heads.

More on colostrum management overleaf.

The only way to identify enzootic abortion is to test for it!

This lambing season, speak to your vet about EAE testing if you experience:

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A beginner's guide to the importance of colostrum feeding at lambing time

Colostrum, known as 'first milk' or 'liquid gold', is critical to the short and long-term health of lambs.

Emily Hall of Nettex encourages producers to know more about it and the strategies for optimal feeding.

She says: "Thick, yellow and creamy, maternal colostrum is high in energy and protein to give newborn lambs a metabolic and immunity boost. Lambs have no circulating antibodies in their body when they are born. After the ingestion of sufficient quality and quantity of colostrum, the level of antibodies circulating and the lamb's immunity increases significantly. This is called passive immunity."

The proteins in maternal colostrum are made up of immunoglobulins, or antibodies. The most important is IgG, which circulates in the blood to protect against and fight off bacteria and viruses.



Colostrum plays a key role in lamb performance through improved health.

Antibodies

Because a ewe's immune system will be producing antibodies against the pathogens present, its colostrum will be full of the required antibodies a lamb needs to be protected from those same pathogens.

"In some cases, supplementation may be required, either from other ewes lambing at the same time or in the form of a replacer," says Ms Hall.

While it is very common in triplets, a study found 30% of twin-bearing ewes and 10% of singles do not produce enough colostrum. In addition, if maternal colostrum feeding has been delayed, greater amounts will need to be fed to ensure lambs absorb enough IgG for passive immunity transfer.

Colostrum provides lambs with a rich energy source to maintain their body temperature and bodily functions. According to Ms Hall, the majority of lamb deaths within the first 48 hours of life – which make up 49% of total lamb deaths – are a result of inadequate colostrum consumption, leading to a lack of energy and hypothermia.

"We see a huge demand for colostrum supplementation when cold weather hits, as lambs receiving enough colostrum have the energy to prevent hypothermia," she adds.

When supplementation is required, Ms Hall recommends feeding as much maternal colostrum as possible, to give lambs pathogen-fighting antibodies, and topping up with a high quality, full fat colostrum supplement for energy.

"If you have multiples and are short on colostrum, split the ewe's maternal colostrum between the lambs, so they use antibodies for passive transfer, and then fill the rest of their requirements with a colostrum supplement," she suggests.

"Whenever a ewe has a surplus of colostrum that meets quality requirements, freeze the excess in a flat freezer bag immediately after harvesting. Bacteria rapidly multiplies in colostrum due to the high fat content so high level hygiene measures are critical. Date and label the bag with the ewe number for records."

Frozen colostrum

When it comes time to use the frozen colostrum, it must be thawed gently in warm water, as high temperatures and microwaving will kill off the antibodies.

While feeding from the ewe is best, it is uncommon for farms to have an adequate supply of high-quality ewe colostrum on hand for supplementation. According to Ms Hall, farmers need to be prepared to supplement with colostrum powder.

"There are a lot of colostrum powders on the market and they vary in quality and source. Look for a colostrum supplement that mimics the ewe's colostrum," she says. Her recommendation is that colostrum powders should be full fat, contain vitamins and minerals, and be certified free from

TB, Johnes and enzootic bovine leukosis. To be complementary to UK farms, look for colostrum that is developed from UK herds.

If a lamb has received very little maternal colostrum, supplement it with a higher rate of colostrum powder of around 50g. If it has received some ewe colostrum, this rate can be pulled back to 25g of powder, advises Ms Hall.

"Whether lambs can get all of their colostrum from the ewe or if you are needing to supplement, it is essential for the short and long-term health of the lamb to ensure it is receiving adequate amounts of the right quality," she concludes.

More on colostrum management overleaf.

The 3Qs of colostrum

- Quality.** Colostrum needs to be a minimum of 50mg IgG/mL.
- Quantity.** For disease prevention, lambs need 50ml/kg of body weight in their first feed and a total amount of 200ml/kg within the first 24 hours of birth. To prevent hypothermia, lambs should receive an additional colostrum feeding within the first 18 hours.
- Quickly.** The first feed should be within six hours of birth.

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Colostrum is worth its weight in gold

By Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

Having looked at more than 1,000 ewe colostrum samples, there is no doubt there's nothing better than colostrum straight from a well-fed ewe in good body condition – it really is worth its weight in gold.

I recommend farmers harvest spare colostrum from ewes as the best contingency for hungry lambs. If you have not discovered it already, you will find this job so much easier using a hand-held trigger-operated vacuum pump to extract colostrum. It's a hugely valuable piece of equipment for any lambing kit, alongside a brix refractometer to measure the colostrum quality.

Colostrum alternative

Cow colostrum is a good alternative and high in immunoglobulins. Although rare, it is important to pool colostrum from a few cows to mitigate against the risk of causing lamb anaemia.

Store all harvested colostrum in small clean containers in the fridge for up to a week or in the freezer for longer. Defrost carefully, as microwaving can damage the fragile immunoglobulins.

Colostrum produced by your own ewes will trump anything you can buy in a bottle or package. You can't afford to overlook this valuable asset.



Checking colostrum quality is a good way to ensure lambs get the best start.

Case study: lambing at Overtown Farm

Overtown Farm is a 560-acre (225ha) organic farm in the Cotswold Hills, Gloucestershire, run by NSA members Pauha and Martin Whitaker.

By introducing better colostrum management, they have saved time spent to treat and nurse sick lambs at a time when skilled labour is already under pressure, reduced financial losses and decreased medicine use, helping to tackle antimicrobial resistance.

Mr Whitaker comments: "The level of watery mouth in lambs in the first few days of life had always been a source of great frustration to us.

"We have no dedicated lambing shed so the ewes lamb in a shed used to house cattle in winter. As the cows calve in late February onwards, it is often a race against time (and weather) to get them turned out and the sheds cleaned and disinfected to house the ewes.

"Ideally the sheds would be left empty for several weeks but, in reality, ewes may be housed within 72 hours of the cattle vacating them, so there is always a background level of contamination impossible to remove."

Watery mouth

Despite full disinfection of lambing sheds and equipment, careful monitoring of ewe protein intake from four weeks pre-lambing and strict hygiene measures, levels of watery mouth were stagnant at around 9%, equating to 60 lambs each year.

"We always tried to milk out and feed colostrum to vulnerable lambs, but at busy times or when there was no fresh colostrum available, we had to rely on expensive powdered colostrum," says Mrs Whitaker.



The Whitakers have harvested and used on-farm colostrum.

The Whitakers decided to utilise record keeping to their full advantage. They EID tag all lambs, allowing lineage to be monitored easily.

Mrs Whitaker says: "We started to record ewe BCS at various points during the year and actively selected ewes who held their BCS throughout the season. In theory, along with adequate levels of high-quality protein fed at lambing, this should mean colostrum quality could be optimised."

They decided to purchase a hand milker to harvest colostrum from any milky ewes, and a

brix refractometer to test colostrum quality. They found the hand milker simple to use and relatively inexpensive, making milking out ewes fast and hygienic. But it was the brix refractometer (around £15) that was a real game changer.

Mrs Whitaker continues: "It only takes seconds to strip a few drops of milk from a ewe when its penned up at lambing and read the figure on the brix scale. More than 25% translates to good quality colostrum, giving lambs protection from e.coli and other pathogens until their own immune systems develop.

"If the value falls under 25%, it simply isn't good enough and the lambs should be fed colostrum from another ewe if possible, although it can be mixed with colostrum from other ewes and retested to give a pooled sample with a higher brix value."

Freezing colostrum

The other advantage of using the refractometer comes when deciding which colostrum to freeze. Any colostrum milked out to be frozen for later use can be tested to make sure it is worth keeping.

Mrs Whitaker continues: "At the same time as testing colostrum, we BCS the ewe and record both figures with the EID reader. This means at the end of the year, any ewes with poor BCS and poor colostrum quality can be marked out as potential culls, improving the breeding stock for subsequent years.

"This quick and cheap addition to our lambing system helps us know exactly which litters could be colostrum deprived and vulnerable to diseases, enabling us to take pre-emptive action to supplement the lambs and reduce the chances of infection."



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Livestock Intelligence™

Be sure to look out for joint ill in neonatal lambs

Joint ill is just one of the infectious diseases to be wary of at lambing, common in lambs up to one month old and characterised by an arthritic inflammation resulting in lameness, ill thrift and, in some cases, death.

Usually impacting 1-2% of lambs in a flock (though up to 50% has been reported), joints will often appear swollen and hot to the touch. Any joint can be affected, though larger joints such as fetlocks, knees and hocks are most often affected. Spinal joints are occasionally involved, which can bring about paralysis of the limbs.

Streptococcus dysgalactiae is the most common bacteria reported, accounting for more than 80% of joint ill case in the UK.

It is likely lambs become infected with *Streptococcus dysgalactiae* at birth or soon afterwards, either from the environment or directly from the ewe. *Erysipelothrix rhusiopathiae*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *E.coli* and *Actinomyces pyogenes* have also been observed.

Bacterial infection

Bacterial entry is likely to require a skin wound, meaning the navel is often implicated as a route of infection, but not in all cases. Other potential entry points include lesions linked to ear tagging, tail docking and castration, as well as via the lamb's mouth.

Bacteria present in the vaginal tract of some ewes can contaminate the skin and teats of the ewe, the structure and bedding of lambing pens and the hands and gloves of those

assisting lambing resulting in infection. Once infected, the bacteria localise to the joints via the bloodstream. Without adequate hygiene measures, an infection may pass from ewe to lamb or ewe to ewe.

Diagnosis of joint ill is often based on clinical signs and treatment should begin as soon as possible after these occur, to reduce the damage to the joints and ensure the best outcome.

Identify cause

To ensure you are using the correct treatment and control, it is advised to ask your vet to collect samples to confirm which bacteria is causing the infection. Bacteria can be cultured from fluid samples taken from inflamed joints to identify the causative species and to determine antimicrobial sensitivity, enabling farm specific measures to be designed and an effective antibiotic treatment chosen.

Alternatives to using antimicrobials are required to limit antimicrobial resistance, and an effective vaccine would be useful. Early indications from vaccine development studies undertaken at Moredun and in Norway have provided promising results.

The studies focus on improving the quality of the colostrum by vaccinating the ewe prior to lambing. Antibodies are then transferred to the lamb through the colostrum, providing protection against infection during the early stages of life.

In the future, joint ill control will likely require an effective vaccine acting in combination with optimising colostrum quality, quantity and delivery, as well as targeted hygiene measures.

More at www.moredun.org.uk/resources/factsheets.

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun 



Quality and quantity of colostrum can prevent joint ill in lambs.

Joint ill control tips

- Ensure good lamb colostrum intakes, good ewe and farm hygiene practices, as well as dipping lambs' navels in iodine.
- Using of whole flock prophylactic antibiotic treatment (for example treating most or all lambs) is not a sustainable or recommended control strategy.
- Oxytetracyclines are usually ineffective against *Streptococcus dysgalactiae* infection – but speak to your vet.
- For best chance of recovery, ensure the lamb gets the full course of treatment as prescribed by the vet. Long courses of antibiotics may be needed.
- Infected lambs and ewes may need to be housed until treatment has finished, as catching for repeat dosing can be difficult, particularly as they begin to improve.

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Following the flock

We visit Suffolk, Cumbria, and Wiltshire to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Dan Phipps

NSA Chair, Suffolk



Lambing is underway here, with a notable change this year in the number of ewes that took to the tup immediately after we put them in.

We will have lambed 1,000 ewes before the end of January, unlike the first flush the previous year, which did not occur until early February. We weren't sure how the ewes would take during August with little grass around and temperatures in the mid to late thirties. We know it has influenced the quantity of lambs but is not as dramatically as feared.

The day we put the tups out in August it was 39°C and a raddle crayon seemed to last no more than a minute, two at best. In contrast, the day we put the tups out with the May lambing flock (early December) it was -8°C and a ram needed to pay the ewe considerable attention to leave any evidence it had visited at all!

From 1,748 ewes we are 100 sets of triplets behind last year. We have 1.85% to lamb compared to 1.94% in 2021. This includes the 5.5% of empty ewes put back into the May lambing flock.

We look forward to a strong lamb price to cover the huge increase in costs faced this winter. We have a great young team here and there's a buzz of optimism about the yards, so here's hoping.



Eddie's ewes are in good condition ahead of lambing.

Eddie Eastham

NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee Chair, Cumbria



This time of year is for reflecting on the past 12 months and looking forward to the future.

A year ago we had growing concerns around rising input costs and, as the year progressed, worldwide events and UK political actions escalated costs to unpredictable levels.

Thankfully the weather was favourable in the north west England, with a good grass growing season and dry sunny spells to aid hay and silage harvesting. We appreciate how lucky we were compared to areas where drought conditions significantly affected grass growth.

Prolonged periods of dry weather are rarely a feature in these areas but, perversely, many environmentalists seem to believe large areas of land in the west of the UK should be totally given over to nature, and food production concentrated in the south east.

We try to get the maximum value from grass and so fields intended for spring grazing have been shut since mid-November. Despite recent wet and cold weather, the sheep are in good condition. Replacement ewe lambs are wintering on grass, while one batch of females off very wet ground has been moved indoors and fed quality round bale haylage.

Hill lambs intended for slaughter have been on grass, and now moved onto stubble turnips. These lambs are destined to hit the market in late March/April, hopefully without needing expensive concentrate feed.

Looking forward to 2023, a repeat of last year's weather would be acceptable, along with decent prices for our products and an easing of farm input costs.

Clover Crosse

NSA South East Region committee member, Wiltshire



In November I welcomed 1,350 ewes and shearlings from a neighbouring farm for winter and was feeling rather smug about the cover crop I'd managed to produce for them.

They are split into two mobs of 500 and another of 350, with 12 acre (5ha) breaks. A mix of purple vetch, phacelia and oil radish stood taller than the quadbike and trying to find sheep on my morning rounds was a good problem to have.

However, the wind was quickly knocked out of my sails come December, experiencing 12 consecutive days below 0°C. That really hit the cover and dropped my grazing from 10 days to only two days per break. It was a sad sight and a great loss of winter feed.

At least the arable ground will still reap the benefits of the golden hoof. Visible root nodules are evidence the vetch is fixing nutrients the previous crop left behind. Without the presence of a cover crop these water-soluble nutrients, particularly nitrogen, would be lost through rainfall.

As the cover breaks down, nitrogen will be released for the following crop, reducing our bagged nitrogen input. As mobile green manure converters, the sheep recycle the crop into a more manageable state and help terminate the crop reducing glyphosate use. We can then direct drill spring crops into cover remains.



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