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Joining the dots between funding and delivery



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Farming has forever been in some form of transition, influenced by the needs of society and affected by economic, environmental and policy conditions.

This time you could argue there was some forward thinking about the transition England and the devolved nations were facing when the UK left the EU – but while the general direction was clear, the detail was, and still is in many areas, vague.

To make things worse, plans for agricultural transition lauded in 2020 didn't see a global pandemic around the corner, nor a war in Ukraine, causing high levels of food and input inflation, with major disruptions to food and energy supply chains.

In theory we are a third of the way through the planned transition in England and, in the words of one of Defra's most senior members of staff, we are at 'peak confusion'. That term is of little help to farmers struggling to understand the plethora of new schemes and new standards, or trying to understand how they might replace a declining Basic Payment Scheme, even though experience is showing, once you get going, the application processes are not as difficult as you might think.

Pulling some positives from this, a peak always has an incline and a decline, and if Defra has peaked then we should expect major efforts to simplify things.

Predictions

The last issue of Sheep Farmer outlined what NSA proposed for new scheme design back in 2017, comparing it with what is now emerging. Once you accept things were going to change radically, the emerging offer isn't a million miles away from what we suggested – except I remember vividly saying farmers weren't interested in Defra scheme classification and should be encouraged to carry out actions and make investments that work for their farm and business, leaving Defra to worry about which box the money came out of. Is that where we will be in a few years time, a giant nature and environment scheme with a sustainable farming element, with

a tick box of options for capital and revenue support?

Staying on the theme of peaks, I'm not alone in being increasingly concerned about the hill and upland farming sector. We are still far from having upland or commons support that puts a proper value on a traditional and well-balanced, sensitive livestock farming working in harmony with natural resources and the environment, not to mention the value of embedded rural communities.

James Rebanks articulated this perfectly on BBC Radio 4's *Farming Today* in mid-March when he suggested the lack of support and options for upland farms, and the fact we are still seeing payment rates based largely on income foregone rather than any real value of public goods, would result in farmers having little choice but to push their livestock systems to a level that brought farming and the environment into conflict.

Heritage

It is right to remember that while we can and must do more, and better, most of our uplands are created from hundreds if not thousands of years of grazing and farming activity, and to lose this integral part of sheep farming would, I believe, be regretted in time.

Finally, I'd like to make as much noise as possible about now being time to 'join the dots' between what new government schemes are encouraging and rewarding farmers to do versus what is about to be required by assurance schemes and Defra.

Examples include the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway (and similar devolved schemes) and the health planning requirements of farm assurance, Pathway (again) and the requirement for vet attestations for meat export purposes, and carbon audits increasingly required for dedicated supply chains and being discussed in parts of assurance.

It is difficult to argue against the value of doing these audits, but why not relate them to new schemes so funding and services are available to get them done? This is already an option through Defra's future farming resilience fund where free advice, including carbon audits, can be provided, but few seem to know about it and, in the meantime, the dots remain disconnected.



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Front page picture credit: Kerry Hill ewes and lambs – Agri Marketing.

NSA prize delivered to loyal supporter

Long-standing Gloucestershire-based NSA member Charlie Washbourne is now the lucky owner of a state-of-the-art sheep handling system, thanks to a giveaway from NSA and Te Pari.

Mr Washbourne was given a full run-through of his prize, the Te Pari Racewell HD3 mobile sheep handling system, during a delivery demonstration by the Te Pari team. He says: "It is a serious piece of kit. I feel like I've only seen and learnt a small fraction of what can be achieved with the system but I'm looking forward to learning more as I use it. The first thing I'm going to do though is insure it!"

The competition was open to both NSA members and non members but was won by Mr Washbourne, a third-generation farmer, who has been an NSA member for more than 30 years. "I have always valued my NSA membership," he says. "NSA does a lot for our industry and I really enjoy the Sheep Farmer magazine."

Nicola Noble, NSA Project Manager, joined the Te Pari team and Mr Washbourne at the demonstration. She comments: "It was great to deliver the prize to Charlie to give him something back for his continued support as a valued NSA member for so many years. I'm not sure it's fully sunk in yet, just what he now owns, but it was clear he is keen to understand just what the new handling system can do to help him manage his flock."



Charlie Washbourne, winner of the Te Pari handling system.



New NSA sheep conference planned for October.

Inaugural NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference

A brand new NSA event this autumn will bring together the nation's sheep farmers to hear from industry experts at the NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference.

The event will take place on Wednesday 25th October in the convenient location of the National Conference Centre, Birmingham, very close to air, rail and road links to open the day up to delegates across the UK.

This new event will be the headline feature of an NSA Health and Welfare week also featuring Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Online, a series of three excellent evening webinars organised by NSA South East Region. Members can look forward to a fantastic line-up of the very best speakers from the UK sheep sector so are urged to add the date to their diaries.

NSA and Moredun unite to tackle sheep scab

NSA's continued partnership with Moredun will see another informative webinar taking place on Wednesday 19th April at 7.30pm.

The online session will provide an update on the latest situation with sheep scab in the UK and offer advice on prevention and treatment with independent sheep adviser Lesley Stubbings and Moredun's Stew Burgess. Further topics planned for 2023 are sheep vaccines and reproduction challenges, all with CPD points allocated for industry professionals. [Find more details and register at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).

AGM save the date

NSA is excited to announce a world-famous venue for its 2023 AGM on Saturday 12th August.

NSA Eastern Region will host both the national AGM and its Next Generation event, including the regional Next Generation Shepherd Competition, at the Godolphin Stud, Newmarket, Suffolk.

Under the management of Dan Phipps, NSA Chair, the sheep at Godolphin share grazing with some of the world's most prestigious racehorses, owned by HH Sheikh Mohammed, ruler of Dubai.

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Update on UK castration and tailing regulations

In the last issue of *Sheep Farmer* there was an article on castration and tailing including a table of legally permitted practices across the UK – and it stimulated plenty of healthy conversation.

If you are part of a farm assurance scheme, NSA would like to clarify you should always adhere to the assurance schemes rule, as these may be slightly different. NSA does not advocate tailing using a cold knife (however sharp) with or without anaesthetic.

Decisions on castration and tailing should be made within the principles of reduce, refine and replace. Anaesthetic should be used with any tail removal other than rubber rings before seven days of age. Talk to your vet about available options.



Stay legal on castration and tailing regulations.

Future farming schemes policy direction

Defra Director Janet Hughes was the speaker at the NSA Breakfast Club in March, discussing various new schemes and the direction of policy in England.

The webinar also covered accessibility and how these schemes might deliver for food, farming and the environment now and in years to come. [Watch the session back at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars).

NSA welcomes small abattoir funding

NSA has openly welcomed funding for small abattoirs in England, as announced by Minister Mark Spencer in February.

While details are to follow later in the year, NSA believes the injection of cash will boost the stability of smaller, independent abattoirs, support local produce availability, provide infrastructure to support the rearing of rare and native breeds, encourage rural employment and safeguard the food supply chain. NSA is delighted to see results after numerous calls for aid.



Funding for small abattoirs in England has been promised.



NSA stresses the importance of better recognition of upland and hill farms.

NSA speaks out for stratified sheep system

Discussions about sheep in the hills and uplands were continuing in earnest as this magazine went to press, both within NSA and externally.

Recent press coverage has included NSA Chief Executive speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Farming Today* to highlight the complexities of the upland landscape and how farming in these areas cannot be ignored. NSA has long promoted the importance of upland farming communities to the wider industry. This is commercial sheep farming, not conservation grazing, but NSA is keen to discuss that we are living and farming in changing and challenging times that will require adaptation to survive.

He also highlighted the importance of mixed farming systems across the stratified sheep system, utilising lowland and arable ground to extend the grazing season and also extend the benefits sheep offer in a modern form of transhumance. NSA is working hard to ensure the diverse range of public goods delivered by hill and upland farming is rewarded fairly, ensuring all systems are represented on a level playing field. [More on page 12.](#)

No movement on carcase splitting rules

NSA continues to push the government for a decision on carcase splitting rules.

Since NSA's report in 2017 highlighting the huge cost carcase splitting regulations are causing, we are once again in 'tooth eruption season', no further forward and unable to get Defra or the Food Standards Agency to show any interest in the industry proposal to move to a pre agreed date of 30th June in the year following birth for splitting. This would give certainty to farmers and reduce industry costs with no increased food safety risks.



Regulatory inaction continues to frustrate.

NSA continues to push for legalisation of smokies

NSA remains frustrated the Food Standards Agency (FSA) still hasn't responded to industry proposals for changes to domestic legislation allowing production of skin-on sheep meat (smokies).

This is despite FSA asking the European Commission to change the EU law on smokies 10 years ago, feeling safe in the knowledge investigations at that time had shown hygienic production of smokies was possible.

NSA will continue to work hard on this subject, even though efforts to produce in-demand smokies safely within a regulated framework are being thwarted.

Sheep skin disposal costs remain problematic

NSA is acutely aware sheep skin disposal costs remain an issue in the supply chain.

As reported in the last edition, NSA continues to work alongside industry bodies to improve knowledge and identify options for skins.

Upskill with NSA workshops this summer

NSA Next Generation will be running a series of workshops this spring and summer offering young sheep farmers the opportunity to increase their knowledge and practical skills.

The first event will take place on Saturday 20th May in NSA Central Region, offering those interested in sheep breeding and showing the chance to learn more about preparation of sheep for showing and sales, covering nutrition, performance recording and fleece trimming for presentation.

Kindly hosted by NSA Trustee and highly experienced sheep breeder Charles Sercombe at Sandlands Farm, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, this will be a great event for young pedigree sheep enthusiasts. The event is open to members and non-members aged under 35, from however far they are willing to travel.

There will also be two NSA Next Generation sheepdog training days later in the summer. Details will be shared via NSA communications and the next issue of this magazine.



Learn about show and sale preparation this May.

NSA welcomes new regional officeholders

Matt Bagley was welcomed as NSA Central Region's Chair at its recent Annual Regional Members' Meeting.

Now the Farm Manager at Lincoln University, Matt has a history of involvement with NSA after previously sitting on the NSA Northern Region committee during his time as Head of Agriculture at Newton Rigg College, Cumbria. Matt succeeds James Bickerton, who NSA thanks for his time and hard work while in the role.

Meanwhile, the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Committee has announced Geoff Probert of Holt Heath, Worcestershire, as its new Vice Chair. The Probert family has been a stalwart support of the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale for many years, continually achieving high prices for its Charollais rams. Mr Probert will succeed the current chair Graham Jones, in May 2024.



Geoff Probert is the new NSA Wales & Border Vice Chair.

NSA Regions

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NSA regional reports

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

NSA Northern Ireland Region is getting ready for Balmoral Show, where we will bring together sheep breed societies, commercial companies and others in an NSA Sheep Centre.

There is still a limited amount of trade stand space available in the marquee, which will be located alongside the sheep judging area as usual. The region extends an invitation to all sheep farmers visiting the show on Wednesday 10th-Saturday 13th May, not only NSA members.

Plans are well underway for the NSA Sheep Northern Ireland event on Tuesday 4th July. We are very excited to be on a farm this time and know it is going to be a fantastic day for the industry. *More about NSA Sheep NI on page 10.*

NSA Eastern Region

By Josh Brock, Manager

NSA Eastern Region welcomed Caroline Nicholls from Defra to talk to members in February.

There was a good turn out and all who attended benefitted from the information shared on future support schemes, and made the most of the chance to ask Defra further questions.

Thank you to all those who registered in advance for the event, making organisation straightforward. There are plans to run future events using the same process. The region is currently organising its next event, to take place in early June. The region is also pleased to announce on Saturday 12th August its NSA Next Generation Event will kindly be hosted by Godolphin, Newmarket, Suffolk, alongside the NSA Annual General Meeting. We appreciate Godolphin sharing its superb facilities.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

NSA Scottish Region was pleased to host a webinar in early April looking at the strengthened laws in Scotland surrounding sheep worrying by dogs.

This was held to complement NSA's national awareness campaign running the same week. Regional Chair Peter Myles was joined by police representatives and legal experts to discuss this serious topic and provide guidance for what sheep farmers and crofters can do when incidents occur.

NSA's sheep worrying survey available at www.sheepworrying.org.uk.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

It's getting close to NSA Sheep South West and, needless to say, the organising committee is working hard to deliver a great event – we look forward to seeing you there.

Among a large variety of stands and activities will be the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. Visit the event website or contact the region for an entry form. In addition, anyone interested in entering the 'all things sheep' photographic competition should please send in entries or bring them on the day to the NSA stand before 10am to be included.

Thank you to all who made it to our Annual Regional Members' Meeting in February. While it was unfortunate Andy Neal from North Wyke had to pull out at the last minute, his talk will be rescheduled for later in the year. Thanks go to Emma Bradbury, NSA Policy Manager, for an extended and interesting policy round-up. *Event information on page 6 and special host farm feature on pages 24-25.*



The Region is preparing for the show season.



Sheep worrying is still a big problem.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

In late February, NSA Northern Region welcomed Defra to Darlington, County Durham, to discuss how farm support schemes and grants will look in the future.

It went well, but Defra reps left many questions unanswered on how things will roll out with the scale down of the Basic Payment Scheme. The region has been in contact with Defra airing these concerns and organising another on-farm meeting in the autumn, to (hopefully) clarify some of the uncertainty.

Planning is well underway for NSA North Sheep with a full event preview and host farm feature in the next edition of this magazine. *Event teaser on page 10.*

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

NSA Cymru/Wales Region held its Annual Members' Meeting in February with all existing officers re-elected.

The meeting saw updates from NSA Communications Manager Katie James and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Michael Burley, who talked about his trip to the Sheep Breeders Roundtable, thanking the region for sponsoring his attendance. Michael explained how he has benefited directly from the sponsorship by increasing his knowledge and inspiring ideas for the future.

Gavin Watkins, acting Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, also provided an insight into his work and highlighted the emerging risk of iceberg diseases. *NSA Welsh Sheep information on page 8 and host farm feature pages 26-27.*

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

Like our NSA colleagues in other parts of England, NSA Marches Region welcomed members to an informative meeting with Defra in February.

It provided an opportunity to hear from Defra Head of Engagement Giles Hall, raise concerns and ask questions about the new farming support schemes.

As many now retreat to the lambing sheds and fields, plans are coming together ready to welcome you all an enjoyable post-lambing farm walk in May. Members residing in the region are encouraged to look out for further details on the NSA website, emails and social media in the coming weeks.

NSA Central Region

By Lizzy Wells, Manager

The NSA Central Region Annual Members' Meeting in February welcomed Matt Bagley as our new Chair and Matt Hayden as Vice Chair.

James Bickerton chaired the NSA Central Region ARMM.

The region thanks James Bickerton for his work as Chair over the last two years, and also Jack Charlton, who served as Vice Chair but doesn't step up to the main job (yet!) Thanks also to Bagshaws at Bakewell Market for hosting.

There was a good turnout for the meeting where, after formal business, a farming reform update was given by Ruth Little of Defra. This was a helpful insight to the new incentives being introduced. NSA Project Manager Nicola Noble also gave an update on Head Office activity.

Planning is well underway for three regional field days, the first to be in May, and also our Next Generation Shepherd competition. Details to follow soon.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

There was a lively discussion at the NSA South East Region and Defra meeting in late February, with the Defra rep taking away from important points that needed further clarification.

Following the successful NSA Next Generation Shepherds' competition held alongside the Southern Shears competition last year, the region has been invited to make this an annual occurrence. This year's competitions will take place on Sunday 14th May at Copford Farm, Heathfield, East Sussex, and will concentrate on assessing the practical skills and knowledge of entrants particularly on flock health and welfare. Further details and entry forms will soon be available on the NSA website.

Looking further ahead, planning is underway for Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Online, our virtual conference that will happen as part of NSA's first ever Sheep Health Week this October. In addition, there will be the regions second ram sale in September and farm walks throughout the year.



Next Gen shepherds will compete again this year.

Farmers Guardian

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South West sheep and dairy farm ready to open gates

Having waited four years for its return, it is with much excitement organisers of NSA Sheep South West look forward to welcoming visitors back to the premier sheep event in South West England.

The event will take place on Wednesday 10th May at Paterhayes Farm, just outside Yacombe, Honiton, Devon, where the Derryman family will act as hosts.

Henry Derryman, sons Peter and Robert and Peter's son Philip represent three generations of this family, one of the most respected for both its stockmanship and success in the showing - not just in the region but also nationally through pedigree sales of Hampshire Downs and Suffolk breeding stock.

Although the family is looking forward to the event it is with great sadness that Henry's wife, Hilary, passed away at the end of March. Hilary was a huge part of the family business and will be sorely missed. However, the family is determined she would have wanted the event to be hosted at Peterhayes. NSA is grateful for the family's ongoing commitment.

Trade stands

More than 150 trade stands will exhibit at the business-to-business event, enabling visiting commercial and pedigree sheep producers to catch up on the latest developments within the industry.

NSA Sheep South West, with Shearwell Data as the Major Sponsor, will also provide an opportunity for farmers and consultants to meet with representatives from Defra to learn more about and discuss the government's new Sustainable Farming Incentive and Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, critical parts of the farming reforms set out in the Agricultural Transition Plan.

As usual the event will run a full programme of seminars featuring industry experts, as well as the popular farm tours allowing those attending to view the various sheep enterprises run by the Derryman family.

The tours will take in the 320 acres (129ha) at Paterhayes, where the Hampshire Down flock is based as well as the family's 300 Romney ewes, run alongside 120 dairy cows milked on-farm.



Indoor and outdoor trade stands will feature.



A farm tour will take in three different sheep breeds.

NSA Sheep South West



The ever-popular and well supported NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition will feature at NSA Sheep South West again, offering the region's keen young shepherds chance to show off their skills. The contest will include both an open competition, sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers, and a student section, this year sponsored by new event supporters, Kivells Auctioneers.



The popular sheepdog sale is set to return.

Competitions

Keen photographers are also encouraged to compete in the 'all things sheep' themed photographic competition. NSA members, non-members and under-16 years old will all be able to enter for the opportunity to win Harpers Farm Supplies vouchers in each class. Entries for the competition can be forwarded ahead of the event to NSA South West Region Manager Ian May, or brought to the event to be displayed before 10am.

Other competitions to engage visitors will include fleece classes, for which entries must be made to Event Organiser Sue Martyn before Wednesday 3rd May, and lamb selection. The popular and much enjoyed sheepdog sale remains a firm favourite at the event.

More information at www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk.

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, Yacombe, 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.
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Powys farm prepares to welcome visitors to NSA Welsh Sheep



All roads lead to mid Wales on Tuesday 16th May for a much anticipated festival of sheep farming at NSA Welsh Sheep.

While it will be an industry focused event, there will also be a big welcome for the public, with lots to interest all visitors, young and old, whether new to sheep farming or experienced shepherds.

The venue is Redhouse Farm, Aberhafesp, Powys, courtesy of hosts Huw and Sioned Owen, with their son Dafydd, where 180 trade stands and a range of seminars and exhibitions with all the latest industry information will await visitors.

Grand opening

The event will be opened by Glandon Lewis, popular local auctioneer and farmer and partner at Morris Marshall & Poole with Norman Lloyd, who runs Welshpool Livestock Sales, Premier Sponsor of the event and where the event hosts sell their livestock.



There will be plenty to see and do including a farm tour.

Mr Lewis is very much anticipating the occasion. He says: "I'm honoured to have been asked to open the event. I'll be representing the Livestock Auctioneers Association and this invitation acknowledges the important role livestock auctioneers play in the livestock and agricultural industry."

Kate Hovers, NSA Cymru/Wales Chair, is also really looking forward to the event. She says: "It will be a great day, with so much to learn. We will have demonstrations, seminars and also the Welsh Sheep Vet Group will be collaborating on demonstrations and information throughout the day in the Health Hub.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for farmers to emerge after lambing and spring calving to enjoy a day out, refresh and meet up with friends. It will also be a great social event and opportunity to update on the latest trends and health information."

The Health Hub programme will include condition scoring and a demonstration of scanning for ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma, biosecurity tips, and information on ticks and tick diseases. Live demonstrations of sheep dipping throughout the day will be hosted by the Gwaredu Scab Project.

Shepherds

NSA Cymru/Welsh Region will run its Next Generation Shepherd competition during the day, sponsored by the Texel Sheep Society, with the winners presented late in the afternoon on the Texel stand.

HCC, the Major Sponsor, is looking forward to sharing the latest industry

developments. John Richards of HCC says: "It will be a good opportunity to catch up after a very challenging few years."

The Welsh levy board will be putting on butchery and cookery demonstrations throughout the day and, prior to the event, there will be a carcase competition in conjunction with Pilgrim Foods. Entry forms available on website.

Entry to the event is free to NSA members on production of a current membership card and £15 for non members. Free admission for agricultural students (SU card required), under 16s and international visitors (passport required).

Read about the hosts on pages 26/27.



There will be a range of seminar topics for all ages.

Event seminars

Be sure to join the seminars and get the discussion started. Topics will include:

- Food for thought – Where does lamb and mutton fit in a balanced diet?
- Sustainability – How sustainable is our industry?
- Looking after the next generation – What does it mean?

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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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Exceptional livestock on display at NSA North Sheep

After a gap of four years, NSA North Sheep 2023 will return in June, hosted by J.E. Woodman & Son at Bradford House Farm, Ponteland, Northumberland.

Noted livestock farmer Willie Woodman farms 2,130 acres (860ha) with his wife and son. There are two holdings, Great Chesters, a 1,200-acre (490ha) hill farm in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall, and the 930-acre (380ha) Bradford House Farm, a traditional mid-Northumberland livestock and arable farm.

This tremendous farming enterprise is a great example of best practice and visitors who join the event's farm tour will see the Woodman's exceptional quality livestock.

There will be examples from the 250-head Mule flock and 200 Texel crosses that run at Bradford House, plus a display of Blackface sheep from the Great Chesters flock and cattle the family sells forward.



Christine and Willie Woodman host this year's event.

Event activities

Throughout the day there will be a series of seminars discussing the future of the sheep export market, getting into sheep farming and farm support schemes, along with details of the farm's carbon audit results, supported by the event's Carbon Partner Virgin Money.

With support from across the industry, including Hexham & Northern Marts as Major Sponsor, the event will provide an occasion for networking and engaging with the industry through demonstrations and the hundreds of trade stands.

North Sheep

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Email: heather@nationalsheep.org.uk

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Contact Regional Manager, Edward Adamson for further information.

Email: edward.adamson1@gmail.com

Phone: 07711071290

Renowned historic estate to host NSA Sheep NI

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland takes place this summer and, as a first for the event, will be hosted on-farm to offer visitors another element of the show to enjoy.

For many years the event has run successfully at its original home, Ballymena Livestock Market, but this year event organisers are looking forward to taking on the challenge of holding the event at Tynan Estate Farm, County Armagh, owned by Kate Kingan and managed by her and partner Peter Mant Tynan.

The region is indebted to Kate and Peter for allowing the opportunity to bring the event and all its supporters to the beautiful Tynan Estate set in a picturesque wooded area of south Armagh.

Tynan Estate

The estate has a long and illustrious past dating back to the plantation of Ulster and has been owned by the same family since the early 1700s. Around 500 acres (200ha) of the 800-acre (320ha) estate are farmed. The rest is mainly woodland, including the second largest tree in Ireland with a circumference of 17.5 metres.

Visitors to this year's event will be able to enjoy a farm tour of the estate plus a wide range of trade and breed stand exhibitors, competitions, seminars and more.

Event Organiser Edward Adamson says: "Don't miss this incredible day out, made even more worthwhile for its move from the livestock mart to such an interesting and well-run farm."



Hosts Kate Kingan and Peter Mant Tynan.

Thank you to our supporters

Support from the following companies via an annual sponsorship package is invaluable to the work NSA does to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector.

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NSA Ram Sales 2023

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NSA South West Ram Sale Wednesday 16th August – Exeter Livestock Centre

NSA Eastern Region Rugby Sale* Friday 25th August – Rugby Farmers Mart

Thame Farmers Market breeding ewe sale incorporating the NSA South East Region Ram Sale* Friday 1st September – Thame Market

Melton Midlands Sheep Fair incorporating the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale* Friday 15th September – Melton Mowbray Market

NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale Monday 18th September – Royal Welsh Showground

*MV-accredited rams only; MV and non-MV sold at other NSA sales.
See page 4 of this magazine for contact details of our Ram Sales Organisers.



Calls for more support, despite SFI additions for the uplands

At the beginning of 2022 the lack of a meaningful uplands option to the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) in England was apparent, with NSA and others calling for recognition and appreciation of the upland landscapes of Britain.

Emma Bradbury, NSA Policy Manager, says: "With England moving faster than the devolved nations with development of new farming support schemes, we looked to Defra to set the tone for the future – with viable options for all farming types.

"The uplands in England host 53% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and nine national parks. When it comes to what Defra says it wants to prioritise within the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS), they tick virtually every box."

Moorlands standard

In April 2022 there was a significant development with the introduction of the Moorland Grazing Standard (MGS) and a payment rate 55% high than the previous offer, at £10.30/ha. Additionally, farmers of common land would also see a further £6.15/ha in recognition of administration activities needed for the land.

There was also the concession that land entered in the entry level MGS would be eligible

Additions to SFI for the uplands have been piecemeal and potentially confusing.

Type of grassland	Explanation
Improved grassland	Sward composition with at least two of the following: >30% cover of ryegrasses and white clover; <9 species/m ² , including grasses; <10% cover of wildflowers and sedges, excluding white clover, creeping buttercup, docks, thistles and ragwort.
Low input grassland	Sward composition with at least two of the following: <30% cover of ryegrasses and white clover; >8 species/m ² , including grasses; >10% cover of wildflowers and sedges, excluding species as above.
Temporary grassland	Grass or other herbaceous forage for less than five consecutive years.
Intensive grassland	Receiving > 100kg/ha nitrogen a year in fertilisers or manures.
Moorland	Semi-natural habitats including heathland, blanket bog, rushy flushes, swamps, mires, bracken and upland calcareous/rough acid grassland.

even if was receiving Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) funding or was in an existing stewardship scheme.

Things have progressed further again this year, with Defra stating an intention for various types of permanent, temporary and organic grassland to be eligible for stewardship schemes.

There are also more actions that could be undertaken, such as protecting in-field trees on intensive grassland, managing low input permanent grassland outside (£151/ha) and inside (£98/ha) severely disadvantaged areas, restoring and creating species-rich grassland, controlled rushes, and managing wet grassland for wintering waders and wildfowl.

Concerns

But NSA remains concerned – and is far from being alone in its position. Viv Lewis, an upland farmer and NSA Northern Region Chair, has been following developments with interest. She says: "Initially I was positive ELMS would support upland farmers, but the more detail we get the more I believe Defra is treating hill farmers as second-class producers by paying them considerably less per hectare than lowland farmers.

"As costs keep rising there may come a time when delivering these schemes in the uplands becomes unaffordable. Surely the value of biodiversity, carbon, clean water, our most beautiful landscapes, birds and flowers produced in the hills and commons is worth the same, irrespective of whether it occurs in the hills, uplands or lowlands? And continuing to use the income forgone model will not present the right incentives."

NSA continues to work closely with other organisations active in this area. Julia Aglionby of

the Foundation for Common Land and Uplands Alliance comments: "George Eustice's projections of a vibrant, profitable model for upland farming couldn't be further from the reality we're looking at now. This is a huge worry and stress for England's 6,800 upland farm businesses, but should concern all society as we face a nature and climate crises and our much loved national landscapes are at risk."

Breaking news

NSA brought together key officeholders in late March to discuss the recent pressures on hill farmers and will be investing even more energy into this important part of the UK sheep industry.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "We are seeing ongoing pressure to reduce sheep numbers in the uplands, to a point where some areas risk the breakdown of an entire system and infrastructure. We cannot ignore the need to improve natural environments and help rebuild nature, but not enough monitoring has been done over 20 years of upland schemes and the prescriptions set by Natural England are clearly not working.

"We need to question the value of intensification and start to explore ways to more intensely manage these areas – the right stock in the right place at the right time. It will take effort and innovation but there must be real value put on getting things right."



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1. The Parasite Control Guide 2023, AHDB. www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/parasite-control-guide
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Your questions answered on the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

The Animal Health & Welfare Pathway (Pathway) is a Defra scheme that encourages proactive engagement between livestock farmers and vets in England, to work together on specific health priorities on individual farms.

Co-developed through a close partnership of industry, APHA and Defra, for sheep farmers it is structured to start with a general health and welfare review, to include a check on wormer treatments, and then progress over time to more detailed testing and screening for endemic diseases on an individual farm basis.

Why has Pathway been created?

To improve individual flock health, welfare and performance, improve overall health and welfare of the national flock, and create market demand for high health and welfare products.

What does Pathway aim to achieve?

1. Reward farmers going above and beyond legal requirements by improving health and welfare beyond the regulatory baseline.
2. Stimulate market demand for higher welfare products.
3. Tackle antimicrobial resistance and contribute to the One Health policy agenda.
4. Improve biosecurity and reduce disease and parasite transmission.
5. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the livestock sector by having healthy, efficient animals.

What are the priorities for the sheep sector?

1. Getting a vet onto all participating sheep farms to discuss health and welfare in an advisory capacity.
2. Raise awareness of the impact of stomach worms, the use of faecal egg counts, and the effectiveness of any anthelmintic treatments.
3. In time, to support tailored health screening to address a range of endemic diseases relative to the risks on the farm.
4. Reduce lameness.
5. Improve ewe sustainability.
6. Improve on-farm welfare and pain management.

What does it mean for sheep farmers?

Pathway involves an annual visit from your chosen vet addressing issues specific to your farm and flock, with £436 paid to contribute towards costs incurred. For farms already engaged in these activities, it can contribute to or offset existing costs. The programme is called Pathway because it is intended to start with a health and welfare review and progress to more targeted endemic disease control.

What does it involve?

There is a compulsory aspect of the first visit for sheep, a Worming Treatment Check, following a faecal egg count and if worming is needed. This is covered in the funding and must be completed by an accredited lab to be advised by your vet. However, during the vet visit you can talk about whatever health problems bother your flock the most. This is the chance to talk to your vet and create an action plan looking at how you might reduce risk, manage the impact and mitigate future instances.

Who can apply?

Anyone who has 21 or more sheep and who is already a Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) claimant. You will only be able to claim for one class of livestock (either sheep, beef, pigs or dairy) but in time, multi-species claims will be allowed.

I don't claim BPS, will I be able to get involved?

Yes, although not immediately. Defra is working hard to broaden eligibility to all sheep keepers and hope to open to non-BPS recipients soon.

How do I register?

It takes five minutes to sign up at gov.uk. If you go to the webpage and registrations are closed, check back later. Defra has advised it may initially



action temporary closures to manage applications and test the system.

How often can I have a vet visit?

Once every year. However, if you prefer to have shorter more frequent conversations with your vet this can be an option. The Worming Treatment Check needs to be completed within six months of signing up, so plan accordingly.

What will I get out of it?

Once the review is completed your vet should supply a report detailing the issues discussed and a plan of action. The visit can provide a veterinary attestation allowing your farm to supply into export markets.

What will the funding cover?

The initial review funding will cover/contribute towards the cost of the vets' time, the lab costs of the Worming Treatment Check, and your time collecting and posting dung samples. Make sure to submit your claim promptly once your review is complete.

I already do all this. Should I bother signing up?

Yes. If you already do all the activities initially offered by Pathway, it will reimburse the cost – and provide a Worming Treatment Check to further explore the parasite situation on your farm. And getting involved in 2023 gets you ahead of the game for potential payment by results schemes coming in the future.

More information on the Worming Treatment Check on page 44. Equivalents to Pathway are not yet available in the devolved nations, but new schemes are being developed (at varying speeds).

Further detail emerging for future direction of Scottish agriculture

By Emma Bradbury and Grace Reid, NSA

NSA Scottish Region had cautiously welcomed the Agriculture Reform Route Map, but remains firm that Scottish Government must continue to engage meaningfully with industry to ensure desired outcomes are deliverable for all areas.

While not all the detail is available yet, the direction of travel in the route map is as expected and similar to other UK nations, in that the focus is on providing for the environment while producing food.

This has come as something of a relief, as the Scottish Agriculture Bill consultation launched in late 2022 seemed to raise questions about the government's true proposals compared to its Vision for Agriculture published in March 2022.

The route map provides more detail, stating at least half of funding will be targeted to outcomes for biodiversity gain and a drive towards low carbon approaches to improve the resilience, efficiency and profitability of the sector. To help deliver these outcomes Scottish Government will be implementing a tiered approach of base, enhanced, elective and complementary payments.

NSA Scottish Region has welcomed this long-awaited detail but reiterated the need for a thorough evidence base and cohesive approach across all sectors and nations.

Conditionality

Farmers and crofters in Scotland are already operating under conditionality, including legal, cross compliance and greening rules, but new conditionality is expected in the 2025 BPS application form to integrate enhanced conditionality on half of all funding.

In 2026 powers from the new Agriculture Bill will be used for enhanced support directly linked to contributions made in delivering for climate and nature. Scottish Government has clearly stated those pioneering best practice on these fronts will be recognised and rewarded.

To pave the way for enhanced conditionality, Scottish Government launched the National Test Programme in November 2021. Phase one – called Preparing for Sustainable Farming (PSF) – launched in spring 2022 to provide farming businesses with a carbon audit (£500), soil sampling (£600/100ha of region one land) and a development payment (£250).

A knowledge transfer and innovation fund has also been announced and support for animal health and welfare interventions worth a maximum of £1,250 per keeper over two years (see panel).

NSA Scottish Region is proud of the existing high flock health status in Scotland but is encouraged to see Scottish Government further promote this.

New information in the Agriculture Reform List of Measures details the desired high level nature and climate outcomes for the sector, identifying areas where good or improving practice delivers lower emission production.

It is encouraging Scottish Government has stated it will work with industry to further develop detailed actions in each of these areas, but it is anticipated the measures will broadly identify nutrition, genetics and health as focus areas. NSA Scottish Region is keen to continue dialogue with Scottish Government and other farming unions to develop a practical and workable approach to scheme development – and will continue to stress further input is needed to ensure appropriate measures are available for all types of sheep farming enterprises.



Sheep health interventions

- Screening animals to determine whole flock scab status.
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Windsor Framework causing further headaches for NI sheep farmers

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



It seems strange that within the Windsor Framework human medicines move more freely between Great Britain (GB) and Northern Ireland (NI), yet the same arrangement is not being implemented for veterinary medicines.

We hear the UK Government stating a solution must guarantee the existing and long-established flows of trade, so why can't livestock have an arrangement similar to human medicines?

Movements

Disappointingly, livestock movements between us and the mainland are still not resolved. Although the EU amended its delegated regulation allowing for cattle and sheep to move outside the EU regulatory zone and return for up to 15 days, in practice the requirements for it to work have not been implemented.

Livestock marts in GB are required to be APHA-approved export centres, with all animals being of the same health status – but pedigree

sheep breeders have various flock accreditations for maedi visnae and several statuses within the Scrapie Monitored Scheme that prohibit stock from these different groups mixing.



This means that if the NI animals are not sold at an APHA-approved centre (at present only Carlisle is approved and only stock of the same status can be penned within the market) they remain in GB for six months before travelling back to NI, making it financially unviable.

Solutions to these problems require further dialogue and for Daera and Defra to fully

understand the solutions previously agreed so action can be taken. Extra bureaucracy for export centres should be minimised and the value of NI livestock to the UK market more widely appreciated.

On a more positive note, rules for retagging of livestock coming from GB to NI have changed and is no longer a requirement under any agreement, although the detail still needs clarification.

Vision

The Sheep Task Force made up of representatives from NSA, Ulster Farmers' Union, Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association, Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association, the Livestock and Meat Commission and Ulster Wool, has submitted its vision for the development of the Northern Ireland sheep industry. It included suggestions and a stimulus programme to encourage capital investment and adoption of best practice to drive resilience, animal productivity, skills development and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

I look forward to a positive response from Daera, so we can proactively progress with a programme of change.

UK wide medicine shortage causing concerns at critical time for Scottish flocks

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



At the March NSA Scottish Region General Purposes & Policy Committee meeting we welcomed three speakers covering key policy topics.

Undoubtedly interests peaked when Dr Lucy Coyne of the National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) provided an update on the supply of animal medicines in the UK, including availability and cost of vaccines against clostridial diseases and pasteurella.

Shortages

Despite continued communication of supply difficulties, farmers and crofters still find themselves in the same predicament of having to open a large 500ml bottle or resort to leaving animals unprotected and, if disease occurs, increasing reliance on antibiotics and/or compromising overall animal health and welfare on-farm.

NSA will continue highlighting the issue and many other implications on the sheep industry from a four nation approach by writing an open letter to NOAH members.

Forums

Upcoming policy forums include attendance as part of the Food and Agriculture Stakeholders Taskforce (FAST) collective to meet Màiri McAllan, Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform of Scotland, and also chairing the Scottish Government industry-led working group focusing on ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma in sheep.

Announcements on the new Scottish Agricultural Policy have been greatly welcomed, albeit with continued disappointment at the levels of detail. It is clear more work,

better communications and further information is required before farmers and crofters can make an informed decision on their future activities.

Additional Scottish policy update on page 15.



New Veterinary Officer brings abundance of knowledge for Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region is looking forward to working with Richard Irvine, the new Chief Vet for Wales.

Dr Irvine has been working in the profession for more than 25 years and brings with him a wealth of knowledge and expertise, with a background in animal health and welfare, trade policy and science and state veterinary medicine. He has previously spent time in a clinical mixed veterinary practice in South Wales and also held different roles leading animal health surveillance and science programmes at APHA.

Rural crime

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has been invited to a conference this month where the new Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Strategy 2023-25 will be launched. Having attended a recent stakeholder

meeting regarding rural crime it is heartening to see the good work police teams are doing throughout Wales and I am looking forward to seeing the new strategy.

The Powys Rural Crime Team will be in attendance at NSA Welsh Sheep in May to offer advice and highlight its free farm quad marking scheme.

Pollution

NSA Cymru/Wales Region responded to the Senedd consultation on the licencing regime for the Agriculture Pollution Regulations, supporting the proposal to allow, under specific circumstances, to increase the current 170kgN/ha limit on nutrients from livestock manures applied across a holding annually to as much as 250kg,

subject to other environmental protection conditions.

Request more information or a copy of the consultation response from policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.



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1. Cringoli, G. et al., 2003. Efficacy of eprinomectin pour-on against gastrointestinal nematode infections in sheep. *Vet. Parasitol.* 102, 203-209. 2. Bordes et al., 2020. Lack of efficacy of eprinomectin in dairy sheep and goats: resistance or poor exposition of worms to the drug? Poster presented at Congress National des OVI, Poitiers, 2020. 3. Termatzidou, S.A. et al., 2019. Anthelmintic activity of injectable eprinomectin (Eprecis 20 mg/ml) in naturally infected dairy sheep. *Vet. Parasitol.* 265, 7-11. 4. Termatzidou, S.A. et al., 2020. Effect of injectable eprinomectin on milk quality and yield of dairy ewes naturally infected with gastrointestinal nematodes. *Vet. Parasitol.* 285, 10245. 5. Eprecis 20mg/ml solution for injection SPC. 6. Comparison of syringeability of 3 different endectocides (Eprinomectin 20mg/ml, doramectin 10mg/ml, ivermectin 10mg/ml). Poster P04-079. Presented at 29th WBC, Dublin, Ireland 2016.

Enthusiasm and inspiration in the next generation of food producers



A group of enthusiastic young sheep farmers shared their views for the future of the sector with key delegates as they travelled to London for an insightful NSA Next Generation visit.

Following an application process, NSA was pleased to be joined by a brilliant delegation of young farming ambassadors for a two-day trip generously facilitated by NSA President Lord Inglewood. The group toured the Houses of Parliament and engaged in lively discussion with both senior Defra representatives and members of the House of Lords. There was also a visit to the Marks & Spencer's headquarters to discuss its supply chain process and future plans over a butchery display.

One of the delegates was Ailish Ross, who works for the Texel Sheep Society. She says: "Having the chance to convey our personal views as young people was great, on new payment

schemes, supporting new entrants and improving the education of the British public on where their food comes from.

"Speaking directly to M&S about future schemes and having a discussion on the business's commitment to carbon reduction, was fascinating. It gave us all confidence in the future to hear M&S will continue to champion British produce and support local farmers."

Great experience

Jack Walton, a livestock auctioneer from Northumberland, adds: "It was a great experience to share our opinions and worries about the future of the sheep sector with Defra, Lord Inglewood and others."

NSA Chair Dan Phipps says: "I had an enjoyable and thought-provoking conversation with the group in which they demonstrated their



The next generation considered the UK's farming future during a trip to Westminster.

determination to see agriculture and particularly the sheep sector thrive into the future.

"Having such an engaged youth within the sector is incredibly encouraging to the whole industry and policymakers. It is vital that talent is continually nurtured and NSA activities continue to provide those opportunities."

Easier care sheep and diversification for South Wales NSA Ambassador



A move to a more extensive system requiring less labour has been the focus for NSA Next Generation Ambassador Jacob Anthony in the years since he joined the programme.

Jacob credits the NSA Next Generation programme as having given him valuable knowledge and experience, helped him on the farm where he now has sole responsibility for the flock of 1,000 Lleyn cross ewes.

He says: "I found my time on the programme invaluable. I learnt a lot and I was able to implement this new knowledge on our family farm. But not only this, I made many lifelong friends of likeminded individuals."

Efficiency

Before becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, Jacob and his family were already moving the enterprise to an increasingly efficient system with the addition of a 60kw biomass boiler and 11kw wind turbine powering the farm.

As the fifth generation farmer at Cwm Risca, Jacob is now progressing and moving the sheep flock in that same direction, making decisions to improve productivity and welfare – for both the sheep and the farmer.

"We are aiming to breed hardier sheep that require less of our time, benefitting us all," the 30-year-old comments. "Over the past few years we have increased numbers slightly, from 800 to 1,000 ewes. But the main change has been in our move

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. Throughout 2023, NSA will catch up with various Ambassadors from different intake years to see what they're up to now. In this edition it's Jacob Anthony, who joined the programme in 2016 from his home in Tonduu, Glamorgan.



Jacob Anthony.

to New Zealand Texels as a terminal sire rather than the UK type we had used for so many years."

Jacob has been pleased with the ease of lambing the flock of Lleyn cross ewes has experienced since the change. A difference in rams used on ewe lambs has also much improved the system. "We now use a Charmoise ram on our ewe lambs and couldn't be happier with the result. The lambs are out with no issues and are hardy. I have been so impressed by the breed and I believe it has a great future here in the UK."

Diversification

Time saved from improvements to the sheep system is also allowing Jacob to explore other income streams for the farm. This year he has opened a secure dog exercise field offering some of the many local dog owners a safe area in which to exercise their pets without the risk to nearby livestock.

Jacob explains the reason for this new business venture: "One Boxing day we experienced the devastating loss of 40 in-lamb ewes to a sheep worrying attack. This stressed the need for such a facility. Of a Welsh population of three million people, two million live within an hour of our farm, demonstrating the high density of people and pet owners that might be looking for a safe place to allow their dog off lead for training and exercise. As farmers, we can often take for granted the space we have available to us – many don't have that."

The process of setting up a new business 'Dogz Unleashed' started back in 2021. There were the usual planning headaches for access, ecology reports and other necessary permissions all needing to be

acquired before being able to set up the facility. The new venture however, is proving popular in its first few months of operation. "It's been really successful so far with many repeat customers," Jacob adds.

Ambition

Jacob's ambition to continually move the farm forward was recognised in 2018 when he was named 'Young Farmer of the Year' at the prestigious British Farming Awards. He's also continued his own personal development by taking part in Farming Connect's Agri Academy, taking him to Geneva for the programme's Rural Leaders scheme.

This year Jacob's achievements will be once again celebrated as he takes on another ambassadorial role, this time as Ambassador for Glamorgan in its year as feature county at the Royal Welsh Show.

Jacob says: "I am very much looking forward to this. It will certainly be a different Royal Welsh experience for me, with less time in the members area but definitely something to be proud of."



Introducing new breeds has increased productivity in Jacob's flock.



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A determined and adaptable mindset can lead to a lifetime of success

By John Cameron, NSA Vice President

From an early age I was brought up to realise the value of integrating different types of farming under the one banner – and this influenced my approach to farming for the next 60 years.

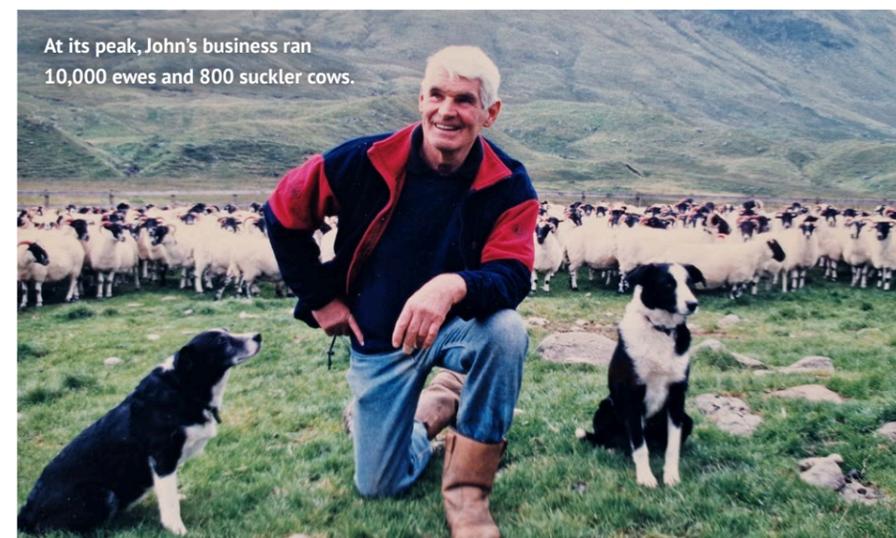
Or it did once I realised farming would replace my involvement in the RAF and ambition for a career as a pilot. I had no siblings capable of taking over the family farm and it became obvious I would have to jump in at the deep end and pick up the farming reins.

Despite it not being my original plan, I learnt we should sometimes embrace our second best objective. A change in direction should not stop us from still putting all our efforts into something, and that's exactly what I did.

Birthright

It is from my mother's line that our home, Balbuthie Farm in Leven, Fife, originates and remains as the focus of our farming enterprise. There was a short time in which my family found themselves tenants rather than owners, due to another family business in the form of a cargo ship sinking during a rough winter causing huge losses. It was at this point Balbuthie had to be sold.

After some time I was able to determine the future of the farm again. I could barely contain my enthusiasm at the prospect and managed to buy the farm back. This was one of the pinnacles of my farming career - to have the knowledge Balbuthie was secure as part of the farming family business.



At its peak, John's business ran 10,000 ewes and 800 suckler cows.

Letter to my younger self



NSA Next Generation thrives because of the enthusiasm of older NSA officeholders to share their time, expertise and advice.

Throughout 2023, Sheep Farmer magazine is embracing that by asking individuals to pen a letter to their younger selves – sharing what they wish they'd known when they were starting out.

The second contributor to this series is John Cameron, an NSA Vice President, once recognised as the largest sheep farmer in Europe.

It would have been easy to accept a different fate when the farm was sold but passion for our past kept me confident and determined for its future, something I'd advise the next generation to try and maintain in themselves.

As Chair of the EU Sheep Meat Committee for eight years I had the opportunity to fashion new regulations relative to the Scottish sheep industry and our joining the EU. These were the formative times of the internal incentive schemes for the sector. I'd always encourage younger farmers to take an interest in policy. For me, this time was another highlight of my career, giving me great satisfaction I could play an active part in helping farmers across Europe.

During my time actively farming I didn't seek to change the agricultural activities laid before me by my father but focussed on expanding



John Cameron (centre) has been an active part of the NSA Scottish Region Committee for many years.

the size of an integrated operation, which at its peak involved some 10,000 Scottish Blackface ewes and 800 hill cows. The integration policy resulted in all the lambs and calves being taken to the arable farm for finishing. Over a period of 30 years I was able to expand, acquiring several other farms both hill and arable and so maintain this important policy of integration.

Looking back

Would I have done anything differently with my farming life? Well, it is all very well to be clever and say so, but you never know what's around the corner, so I'd tell my younger self just to keep going and to enjoy the ride. When I first started out my future plans stemmed from enjoying what I was doing and the type of farming I was involved in.

My age has now meant some downsizing of our farming operation. If I were to start this all over again, I would probably change the expansion and numbers to one which incorporated greater efficiency and sensible integration of specialised products. This would manifest itself through doing more to increase the lambing percentages in the hills and upland areas and, along with the guidance of QMS, to produce product for both domestic and international markets.

I am proud to be an honorary member of NSA. Many years ago it became increasingly apparent to me, if our farming enterprise was to be as efficient as possible, it was high time I joined with the other like-minded individuals I respected and took an interest in the agri-political decisions of the day. This certainly helped me and, hence, I am still a staunch supporter of NSA.

Surplus lambs reared on Ewe-reka outperform twins suckling their mother

ADVERTORIAL

The health and performance of multiple birth lambs born to a pedigree Suffolk flock and reared on a ewe milk-based replacer is matching animals suckling their dam.

Seamus Browne runs Errigal Suffolks at Listillion near Letterkenny, County Donegal, Ireland

Seamus established the flock in 2008 and since then, from an initial select group of six females, he now has 80 pedigree ewes and four stock rams and his flock rates as one of the best in Ireland.

Lambs are regularly weighed as part of Sheep Ireland's Eurostar program; they are also muscle scanned to monitor performance.

Errigal Suffolks are renowned for excellent ratings on the program and, based on performance results, has been recommended by Sheep Ireland to other breeders.

Lambing gets underway on the farm at the end of December with Ewe-reka milk replacer used to artificially rear surplus lambs that cannot be reared on the ewe, usually triplet and quad lambs.

Seamus has been feeding Ewe-reka for three years – he was initially drawn to it for the simple reason that it included ewes' milk and he had heard good reports from other breeders.

"It made sense to feed lambs a milk replacer that was as close as possible to their mother's milk," says Seamus.

Lambs are fed fresh colostrum from the ewe where possible. "Feeding new-born lambs colostrum little and often every few hours during the first 24 hours is the secret, volume required will vary depending on lamb birthweight.

Each of Seamus' lambs consumes approximately 13-15kg of milk replacer for seven weeks on the ad-lib system.

For him, the results seen in both health and performance of lambs reared on Ewe-reka have been exceptional with no poor thrive in multiple birth lambs.

"All the multiple birth lambs reared artificially performed equally as well as their single-born siblings and in some cases better than twins fed by their mothers," he reports.

Ewe-reka is an extremely easy and safe product to use, Seamus adds, with excellent palatability and no evidence of digestive or infective upsets.



Dr Amanda Dunn (Bonanza) with Seamus Browne



"I think the inclusion of ewe's milk in the milk replacer definitely reduces the risk of bloat in the lambs fed on the feeder," he says.

Seamus is satisfied that he has found a product that delivers the high performance he expects from the flock genetics.

After a visit to Errigal Suffolks in the first week of February, Dr Amanda Dunn of Ewe-reka manufacturer, Bonanza Calf Nutrition, noted that lambs born at the beginning of the year and reared on Ewe-reka weighed more than 20kg.

"With excellent genetics, colostrum management, good nutrition, and overall husbandry these lambs were performing excellently," says Dr Dunn.

With ad-lib milk feeding, aim for 17-20% solids. "The most important thing is that the feed is consistent," says Dr Dunn.



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Marketing round up

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

Advertising campaign 'busting myths' of the red meat sector

AHDB's 'We Eat Balanced' advertising campaign returned to television screens, newspapers and social media at the beginning of the year, reaching more than 32m adults.

The £1.5m TV-led campaign focused on protecting long term consumer attitudes to British red meat and dairy and aimed to encourage more British households to continue eating red meat as part of a balanced diet.

The campaign returned to mainstream TV and digital channels, securing top TV spots around primetime viewing. The social media campaign appeared on Facebook and Instagram, achieving more than 56m views and focused on debunking common myths around the role of red meat in a healthy balanced diet and the sustainability of UK farming.

Full page adverts ran weekly in the I-newspaper for the duration of the campaign covering health, welfare and sustainability messaging with supporting banner adverts on Guardian Online. Achieving more than 7.5m opportunities to see, the campaign aimed to showcase the UK's world-class standards in food production and sustainability.



The 'We Eat Balanced' message was also promoted in major supermarkets and AHDB placed eight million on-pack stickers, supporting in-store collateral as well as online banner ads and in-store magazine adverts.

A promotional campaign to support 'We Eat Balanced' featured celebrity doctor Dr Ranj Singh advising Britain to 'wake up to B12'. Dr Singh endorsed the positive role of meat and dairy in our diets with a key focus on the benefits of vitamin B12, which is naturally found in milk and red meat but not naturally present in a plant-based diet. The campaign secured coverage in more than nine national and regional press outlets.

The next 'We Eat Balanced' campaign burst will commence on Friday 8th September and run until late October 2023.

More at www.ahdb.org.uk/WeEatBalanced.



Raising consumer awareness of British wool benefits

British Wool is targeting mainstream press to increase consumer awareness of British wool and its many benefits.



The first campaign back in May 2022 concentrated on wool benefits for women going through menopause, gaining good coverage in many newspaper publications.

This was followed by the 'What side of the bed do you sleep on?' campaign, focused on promoting the benefits of sleeping under and on top of wool products.

Graham Clark of British Wool says: "Wool, and particularly British wool, is an excellent product for sleeping on and under, as it regulates your body temperature leading to better sleep. This is a message British Wool is determined to educate consumers about and, in the process, increase sales of British wool bedding and mattresses."

Fast fashion and its environmental effects have been well publicised over the past few years. British Wool's 'What on earth are you wearing?' campaign aims to educate consumers about wool garments being part of the solution.

The latest campaign focuses on the benefits of using British wool products to help insulate your home, mainly in carpets and insulation. So far it has featured in several regional publications with the expectation it will gain further traction over the coming weeks.

In addition, coverage on seasonal releases such as the British wool Christmas jumper and an article on how to buy more sustainably in 2023 has occurred.

"As we try and change consumer buying habits and promote the wonderful products British wool goes into, it is important we continue to be in mainstream press to help deliver the messages. These year-round activities on multiple themes allow us to do that," concludes Mr Clark.

Visit www.shop.britishwool.org.uk to find out more.

Scotch Lamb radio campaign steps into spring



QMS is set to take to the Scottish airwaves this Easter with a new radio advert focused on dishing up Scotch Lamb.

In the run up to Easter, consumers listening to Bauer Scotland radio stations up and down the country will hear QMS's new advert. Around two in five Scots are expected to be reached.

The advert promotes how to 'dial up the delish' by cooking with Scotch Lamb, which is quality assured, locally sourced, farmed with care and fully traceable. Whether it's traditional roasts or pulled lamb wraps, the promotion will highlight that Scotch Lamb is both versatile and packed with flavour.

The radio advert also covers how the Scotch meat takes its quality and characteristics from a stress-free life grazing on Scottish hills and quality assured farms, and highlights it's a rich source of vitamin B12, which helps combat tiredness and fatigue.

Reinforcing how to identify Scotch, the advert encourages consumers to look out for the Scotch Lamb UKGI logo.

Lesley Cameron, QMS, says: "As the weather gets warmer and the days lighter, our focus for spring is to inspire consumers to choose Scotch at mealtimes."

"Our new radio advert on Bauer Scotland is set to reach more than 40% of the Scottish population, running at four key points during the week. We're aiming to grab the attention of listeners by introducing our new locally sourced, fully traceable, quality assured and farmed with care messaging, emphasising Scotch's sustainable credentials.

"With this in mind, we're looking forward to seeing how Scots react to the new radio advert and how this translates to the dinner table."

QMS shares recipe inspiration at www.makeitscotch.com.

Trade show presence promotes Welsh Lamb exports



HCC has hit the ground running for export development in 2023 with a series of international trade shows taking place early this year.

With domestic demand not as buoyant as it was during the pandemic years, and the cost-of-living squeeze putting further pressure on home consumers, the growing export market remains particularly important for Welsh Lamb.

Trade figures showed the total value of Welsh Lamb exports in 2022 was up to £171m. Exports to the largest European partners – France, Germany and Belgium – were all up on 2021, with the French market alone worth an estimated £77m.

The emerging markets in the Middle East bounced back after covid, with increased trade in the valuable foodservice and hospitality sector. There were notable increases in exports to Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Fewer lamb exports were seen to Hong Kong but growth was seen in North America, with the first shipments to the US made towards the end of 2022 and trade to Canada worth more than £3m over the year.

HCC's first 2023 tradeshow was Sirha, a specialist hospitality and foodservice tradeshow in the French market, held in Lyon. France's reputation as a culinary superpower is renowned and demand for high quality ingredients remains high.

Gulfood took place in February, a week-long tradeshow in Dubai that serves the Middle East and surrounding region. Alongside this busy show, other events were held to further raise the profile of Welsh Lamb in the foodservice industry, including serving it as a special dish in the Dubai Good Food Awards.

In March, HCC attended the American Meat Congress in Dallas, Texas, HCC's first trade mission in the USA since the first shipment of lamb last year and part of a major drive to take advantage of this opportunity.



Positive activity in Northern Ireland to take into 2023



The positive farm to fork story of Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) lamb is being communicated to consumers via the recent relaunch of LMC's 'Good Honest Food' advertising campaign.

Tracking data shows the campaign resonates well with consumers and those who have seen it in the past are significantly more likely to purchase NIFQA lamb. In fact, more than 60% said they purchase or consume lamb at least once a week.

During Love Lamb Week 2022, LMC held a successful sampling event and, working alongside industry representatives, answered consumer questions about local lamb production and nutrition and shared promotional leaflets.



The positive attributes of NIFQA lamb have been shared with approximately 7,200 post primary pupils across 375 demonstrations this academic year. The initial feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with more than 25,000 pupils and teachers valuing the insights LMC demonstrators provided and the knowledge they shared on the nutritional benefits lamb offers to young children.

The summer months will continue to be packed full of activity, offering many opportunities for consumers to engage in positive conversations about NIFQA lamb as a world leading product.

A recent initiative by the Northern Ireland Sheep Industry Taskforce, involving LMC, NSA and other key stakeholders, was the publication of a vision for the development of the NI sheep industry and stimulus packages to support this. LMC says it looks forward to continuing the valuable work of the taskforce to progress implementation of the vision and deliver a resilient, vibrant and sustainable sheep industry for current and future generations.

Suffolks were introduced in 1983 and complement the enterprise well.



Renowned pedigree breeders ready to display stock at NSA Sheep South West

By Rebecca Jordan, contributor

Visitors to NSA Sheep South West in May can see how tradition and technology work hand in hand at Peterhayes Farm, which will host the event just outside Yacombe, Devon.

The Derryman family has farmed dairy cattle and pedigree sheep since 1916 – and repeat buyers for Hampshire Down, Suffolk and Romney breeding stock are a clear indication that five generations of Derrymans are still respected stockmen.

Henry, his sons Robert and Peter and his grandson Philip are all receptive to new technology, ensuring the Yacombe flock prefix keeps a constant stream of private buyers, as well as a high profile in the show and sale ring.

The 90-strong Hampshire flock was established 53 years ago and Henry is an honorary life member of the breed society.

"I was brought up with dairy and sheep and always worked at home. Everyone used a Hampshire Down ram in those days so I decided to try some ewes," he says.

Breeding focus

The Yacombe flock is now one of the society's largest and has its focus firmly set on ram production. With this in mind, New Zealand genetics were introduced as soon as technology allowed, to retain length, reduce back fat and improve hindquarters. The family has performance recorded since the scheme's inception.

"Recording has helped the breed achieve commercial goals – especially leaner carcasses," says Henry.

These ewes lamb in mid-December and scanned 175% lambing percentage this time. Early lambing suits the farm, as it allows ewes and lambs to turn out onto emerging grass growth from the lambing shed.

Lambs are creep fed from the go and any not fit for future breeding sales are finished by Easter at 40kg liveweight.

Up to 50 ewe lambs are kept for breeding annually. There is no shortage of buyers for these females. About 35 Hampshire rams are sold each year, some at the society's main sale at Shrewsbury, Shropshire, and the majority from home.



The Yacombe flock has been a regular feature in interbreed lineups for years now. Henry and his late wife Hilary first showed a pair of ram lambs at Devon County in 1971. One of the family's greatest achievements was at the same show, securing the Signet interbreed championship with a ram in 1987.

"Showing was a steep learning curve. We were very inexperienced and fell into every hole imaginable," recalls Henry. "It was all very different

in those days. Most flocks had shepherds who looked after and turned out sheep with the owners only coming for a few hours for the judging.

"Over the past few years I have become disenchanted with the showing circuit because of the tendency for some breeds to show over-fat sheep. I think there's also a need to be sensible about trimming. I like to see them with less wool to show off the real carcass length and back end, without trimming them into that shape."

Suffolks

Suffolks were introduced in 1983 when Peter was looking for another breed. Foundation ewes were sourced from A.J. Cook and Son, Warwickshire.

"Suffolks remain popular because they are dual purpose and there always seems to be a market for both females and rams," explains Peter, who lives with his wife Cathy three miles away at Mount Pleasant Farm, where this 100-strong flock lambs in February.

This year a majority of ewes held to first cycle at 160% lambing percentage. "Going to the ram in September, they obviously felt the brunt of last year's drought more than the other sheep," says Peter, explaining this lower-than-average lambing percentage.

This crop of lambs is the first for many years where a proportion will be sired by non-recorded rams.

"It is getting increasingly difficult to find rams we like with good figures," says Peter, who bought two lambs at the Suffolk Sheep Society's Shrewsbury sale.

"Performance recording has been a great benefit to us and our customers who have bought into the steady genetic improvement we have

achieved over the years. Progeny has consistently recorded indices in the top 10% for all traits," he continues. "We've always seen it as another sales tool, but we have to like what we look at so every breed here has to be good on its legs, stand square and have a good front and back end."

Peter's brother Robert was keen to introduce a self-replicating commercial breed 17 years ago to utilise some steeper ground the family rents. There are now 300 March-lambing Romney ewes that average 165% lambing percentage with a third bred pure and the remainder put to either a Suffolk or Hampshire. Unlike the Hampshires and Suffolks, these lambs do not receive creep.

Flock health

All breeds are vaccinated against clostridial diseases. Philip, Peter's son, also believes vaccination against lameness has improved the flock's health and performance. Following an outbreak of campylobacter a couple of years ago, ewes are also vaccinated against this.

Last September the Derrymans decided to start shearing the Romneys twice each year. "It was the best thing we ever did," says Philip. "We also did the lambs and they have all gone through the winter better. They are so much cleaner with no muddy bellies dragging around in the wet."

The farm, in an area of outstanding natural beauty on the Blackdown Hills, is in mid-tier stewardship. The majority of the land is down to permanent pasture and long-term grass leys. As part of a 35 acre (14ha) spring barley rotation, an increasing number of herbal leys have been introduced.

"The chicory in them was a godsend last summer in the drought and these herbal leys do seem to have anthelmintic properties," says Philip, who also direct drills kale for the 80-odd shearing rams running across the farm over winter. This green crop is drilled into the spring barley stubble.

The kale is harvested as wholecrop and incorporated in the clamp alongside approximately 60 acres (30ha) second cut silage at the end of July.



The majority of the clamp is filled before the end of May off 160 acres (65ha). Any surplus grass is baled as haylage for the sheep.

EID technology

Five years ago, Philip used grant funding to invest in an electronic identification and management system. Each sheep is pre-populated with every lamb electronically consigned to its mother at birth when double tagged pre-turnout.

"The system is fantastic and saves so much stress and time. Group wormings, vaccinations and weighings are recorded, as well as all movements using the hand-held reader. It is a godsend when we are selling rams off-farm, as there is no need for all those individual movement licences," explains Philip.

"Previously, one of the areas we fell down on was when we used a blue mark on ewes that needed culling. Come shearing time, we would lose track of them and some would enter the flock again. Now, I just flag them up as a cull and that notification will always come up when the ewe's tag is read."

"I think the sheep industry is doing a good job and we are getting better at promoting it to new

markets worldwide," says Peter. "Being involved with NSA over the last few years has opened my eyes to the relentless work required to safeguard the industry. The NSA team deserves huge credit for where the industry is today."

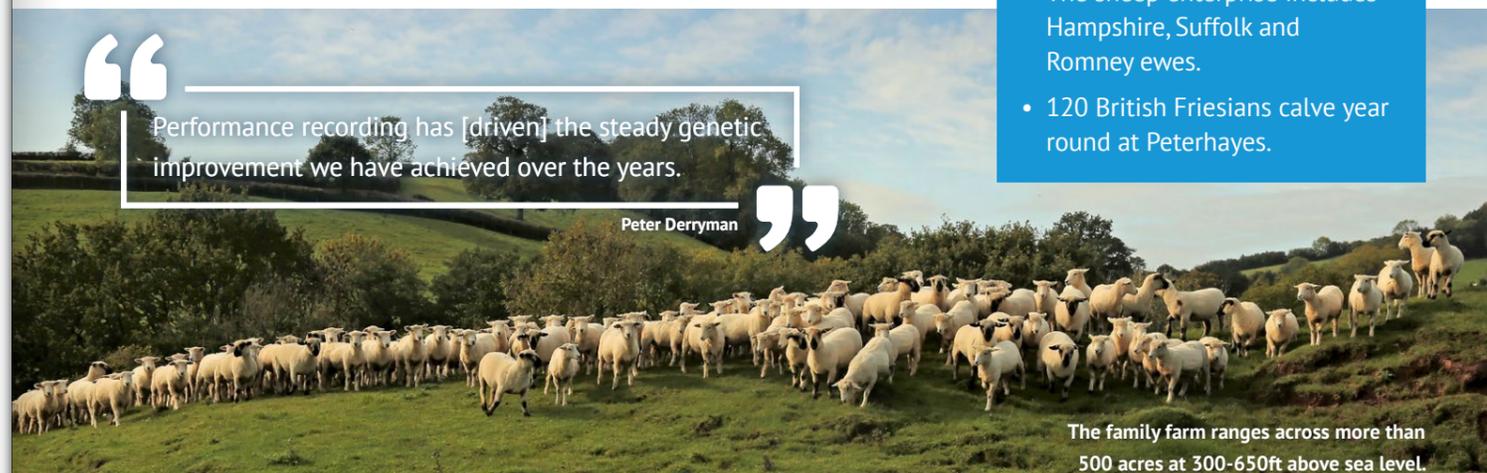
NSA Sheep South West is on Wednesday 10th May. More on page 6.

Farm facts

- Peterhayes Farm secured by Henry Derryman's grandfather in 1916, on a church commission tenancy. Bought in 1962.
- 320 acres (130ha) of stony clay loam 300ft (90m) above sea level.
- Complemented by Mount Pleasant Farm, 120 acres (50ha) of clay loam at 650ft (200m) above sea level and a further 85 acres (35ha) of grass keep.
- The sheep enterprise includes Hampshire, Suffolk and Romney ewes.
- 120 British Friesians calve year round at Peterhayes.

"Performance recording has [driven] the steady genetic improvement we have achieved over the years."

Peter Derryman



The family farm ranges across more than 500 acres at 300-650ft above sea level.

The farm's rich grassland helps to produce quality stock

Prime livestock production on show at NSA Welsh Sheep 2023

By Gaina Morgan, contributor

A welcome return to the farming event calendar this year will be NSA Welsh Sheep, hosted this time by Huw and Sioned Owen and son Dafydd, of Redhouse Farm, Aberhafesp, Powys.

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

At Red House the Owen family have 1,000 mainly Texel cross ewes, together with Dafydd's flock of 55 pedigree Beltex sheep. They also run

a flock of 100 pedigree Texels, plus a similar number of pedigree Limousin suckler cows.

Huw says: "We're all looking forward to NSA Welsh Sheep. God willing, it will be one of the first and best events of the season."

"I believe there will be a lot of people wanting to attend. We'll throw ourselves into it all and show people how we do things. It's a working farm with an emphasis on producing top quality prime lamb and beef.

High standards

"I like to think we do our best to do everything to a certain level. We've got some Suffolk cross Mule ewes and cross them with a Beltex. We also put the Texel yearlings to a Beltex ram. We are proud of our stock and want people to know us for what we are producing," Huw continues.



Huw, Sioned and Dafydd Owen look forward to welcoming visitors to NSA Welsh Sheep.

Lamb production is focussed on producing a good quality carcass, at a weight appealing to all liveweight markets. They aim for about 42kg and above, ideally 45-46kg at the top grade, to reach the widest possible range of buyers.

Huw says: "You get butchers coming back to buy lambs weekly, so you need your lambs to be doing what they want them to do."

"We're producing lambs for the market on the day. We start selling as a rule from June until the end of August. The cattle are all sold as stores and our aim is exactly the same, to produce a high-quality carcass animal that we sell at about 12 months of age supporting local markets at Welshpool and St Asaph.

"Because we're a pure Limousin herd, we produce a good conformation animal and again it's going back to repeat customers. The product we're selling is what they want."

The family say quality is paramount in everything they do and Sioned stresses the farm is a team effort, with everyone helping out where necessary. And they all have confidence in good quality sheep production.

Lambing begins in February with the pedigree Beltex, followed by the Texels and the commercial



The family enjoys keeping a mix of pedigree and commercial sheep.



Dafydd Owen is achieving much success with his flock of pedigree Beltex.

"We are proud of our stock and want people to know us for what we are producing."

Huw Owen

flock at the beginning of March. Ewes are housed before lambing and timing depends on whether they're carrying triplets, twins or singles, as does feeding. Weather permitting, they're out as soon as they've lambed and lambs have sucked.

Triplets and twins are fed cobs in the straw, as well as silage. The singles are just fed silage. They all have ad lib minerals. The family's approach is to look after each and every one, with health and welfare paramount. Dafydd does the night shift, while his parents take the lead during the day.

The calving begins almost as soon as lambing finishes in mid April. The 80 cows are brought in as they start bagging up, so they can be closely watched via CCTV. Huw says they are relatively easy calving and prioritising their health and welfare helps with longevity. Replacement heifers are reared on the farm and each cow is kept as long as possible.

Replacements

The family generally buy in replacement ewes for the commercial flock, but with the Texel and Beltex enterprises, the best ewe lambs are identified and kept. In terms of grassland, they try to plough 10% every year with a regular grass seed mix.

Family and teamwork are at the heart of everything, with one valued part-time member of staff complementing the family unit. Dafydd is at home full-time having finished his studies at Glynllifon College, Gwynedd, and Llysfasi College, Clwyd. At 24, the pedigree Beltex ewes belong to him and he was recently awarded best flock in Wales from the Welsh Beltex Club.

Dafydd is very forward thinking and comments: "I decided to start breeding Beltex sheep around 12 years ago to allow us to breed our own rams for the commercial flock. We do the same with the Texels. Breeding our own rams enables us to produce top quality lambs."

"People will always need food to survive and the sooner governments realise that the better. It's a basic necessity that people take for granted."

Education

Sioned is hugely enthusiastic about NSA Welsh Sheep and the fact local schools and colleges will be invited this time. "I came into farming when I married Huw and I have a real passion for the industry. We work together as a family, sharing the joys and the tears," she says.

"We'll revel in the chance to showcase our industry to the general public this year, as well as to fellow sheep farmers. It will give them more insight into the huge value their food has and the care and attention embedded into rearing the stock and getting such nutritious meat to the table."

"It's a great story and we're so happy to share it. I hope it means young people, especially



The farm is focused on producing prime lambs.

schoolchildren, understand where food comes from – It's important these days."

Huw adds: "It's a growing population and people need feeding. People seem to forget that food needs to be produced."

"The environment is important, but so is food production. We need a more balanced approach from our political leaders and opinion formers. We farm here and try and keep a balance between nature and providing high quality lamb and beef for the public to enjoy."

"We have planted hedges and the countryside around here wouldn't look as it does without it's farmers. As part of our farming routine, we maintain the hedges and double fence to stop the stock getting to them, so they grow and provide shelter for nesting ground birds and small animals."

"Fencing was the biggest challenge when we came here. It's taken years to get to where we are and it's ongoing, as it is on every farm."

The family's joy in continually improving the farm and producing top quality food in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner is evident. They can't wait to share their story with visitors to the event in May.

NSA Welsh Sheep is on Tuesday 16th May. More on page 8.

Farm facts

- Red House covers 550 acres (220ha), rising to 855ft (260m) above sea level.
- 1,000 Texel cross ewes are the core of the farm's prime lamb enterprise.
- Smaller numbers of pedigree Beltex and Texel sheep kept, to produce quality breeding stock.
- 100 pedigree Limousin suckler cows also reared on the farm.

Changes to farm support means external advice may be more valuable than ever



With so many changes to farm support it can be challenging for farmers to know which direction to take their business in and which of the new schemes are suited to their systems.

The removal of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) in all four UK nations will mean change for nearly every sheep farming business, be that adapting existing systems, diversifying and/or applying for new schemes.

Information is readily available for schemes already open for applications, but the volume can be overwhelming. The use of a professional livestock farm adviser, such as one of the experienced members of the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA), could help.

The online RoSA register directs farmers to advisers with specialisms including business management, electronic reading systems, animal health, nutrition and breeding. An area of advice

especially useful during the next year and beyond is guidance to adapt sheep farming business during and beyond the transition from BPS, including ways to be involved in agri-environment and other new funding streams.

Advice

James Oliver, a farm business consultant and sheep farmer from Northumberland, says: "The RoSA network is critical in these ever-changing times with significant shifts in payments and how the government is issuing support. Now is a pivotal time to embrace change.

"Many sheep farmers are already doing a lot of the work needed for support options so they should be rewarded for these practices and easily tap into stewardships schemes. With increasing



James Oliver.

capital costs in farming, these can help with infrastructure such as fencing and hedging." Mr Oliver believes using an adviser who truly understands sheep farming could help to ensure farmers know what is available. He continues: "There are a lot of good advisers out there with practical sheep experience who can relate to their clients and help increase business resilience."

RoSA is approaching its second year of operation. Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "The reason NSA established RoSA, in partnership with BASIS, was because of the monumental changes coming in land use and farm support, driven by global issues of food security and environmental challenge that I don't see going away.

"If sheep farmers are to adapt and succeed it's important there is a network of well-informed, trusted sheep specific advisers. Taking advice should not be judged as a cost but by what benefits it will bring to the farm business."

More at www.sheepadvisers.co.uk/Find-RoSA-Adviser.

Future farming schemes should be seen as management choices, not subsidies, says CAAV.



Focus on what you can control as agriculture transition steps up a gear

By Jeremy Moody, CAAV 

2023 will be the year change accelerates in farming across all nations of the British Isles.

In England the Agricultural Transition Plan begins to become real, with statutory and demanding environmental targets set. Sharper Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) cuts mean, by August, you will have received more than half the basic payment due in the transition period.

In Wales, the Agriculture Bill is in the Senedd, while Scotland is preparing its package of Bills for agriculture, land reform and the natural environment. Both nations plan to introduce new regimes from 2025 – the Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme in Wales and 50% climate change and biodiversity conditionality in Scotland. At the time of writing, Northern Ireland awaits ministers, an Executive and an Assembly.

Challenges

At the same time, the marketplace is under all sorts of pressures including energy costs, incomes adjusting to a poorer economy, inflation, tight labour markets, strained public finances, weather and increased competition for land use. It may yet be the short supplies of tomatoes, salads and other crops resulting from poor weather elsewhere, Morocco protecting its home markets and energy costs of production here, mediated by the supermarkets' approach to supply chains, will draw more effective attention to pricing in markets than has the long running concern of farmers.

The fortunes of farming turn on seeing farming as a business – a business the farmer controls.

In England, policy has been clear for several years. Direct subsidies, effectively paid on an area basis since 1993, are being removed with an unusually long transition to allow farmers to adapt, completed by 2028.

The change is accelerating, with 2023 bringing BPS for most at 65% of its 2020 level in cash terms. By 2024 it will be at 50%. The first two years' cuts took a small 5% and then a further 15%. A 35% cut is significant but funds important new schemes, including this year's £168m of capital support for productivity, animal health and slurry.

This May will see the last land-based BPS forms for English claimants and cross compliance replaced by the law's demands of all farmers. With future payments based on 2020-2022 payments, English claimants must simply 'tick the box' with a valid claim in May 2023, even for as little as 5ha, though it will not affect what is then paid. Those who started farming after May 2022 will not ordinarily have anything – they will be in the new world.

Then it will no longer matter for the remaining run-off payments whether you farm or how much or little you farm. Those will be choices uninfluenced by subsidy, freeing up the structural change hampered since area-based payments began.

It is noteworthy that in each year since 2007 (when the single payment began to settle down) overall activity in the let sector in England and Wales has run at 30-40% of 1999 levels and the number of new farm business tenancies has only been around 25% of the 1999 level. Reducing basic payments and de-linking might reverse that.

The new schemes now available in England,

like those in the devolved nations when they come, should not be seen as BPS substitutes. They are to pay for management above the regulatory baseline. They are options not salvation, to be considered as business choices with their costs and requirements if they suit.

Equally, as the dates for environmental targets for water quality, biodiversity and air quality draw near, expect regulation to require more when grant aid will not be available.

Business focus

Emphasising again the importance of looking first to the business, other markets may be a displacement activity rather than a magic answer. With agriculture at 8% of UK emissions (a rising share as others cut emissions) for 0.5% of GDP, it will be far more important for farms to move towards carbon neutrality than to sell carbon away for low value with long term liability to deliver.

The biodiversity gain and nutrient neutrality markets may offer more value but are likely to be small, local and have long term commitments. They are options – a solar farm lease and a biodiversity gain agreement are for similar lengths and to be judged on terms, price, other opportunities and how the land will be left at the end.

Now, perhaps more than ever, is a time for having good, trusted advisers – not just for specific advice but for external perspective and as a safe challenger, aiding decision making. For the fundamental questions about where your business wants to be in 10 years' time and how it will get there, the agricultural transition gives time for thinking, deciding and acting. But that time will run out soon.

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Carbon benchmarking has highlighted emission sources on-farm.

BUSINESS

Carbon benchmarking enables targeted approach on NI sheep farms

Recommendations made as part of a five-year AgriSearch project are allowing farmers to both maximise profitability and improve efficiency, reducing their carbon footprint.

The Beacon Farm Network, made up of 48 innovative farmers across Northern Ireland, was established as part of AgriSearch's focus to provide research into sustainable farming systems. The farms involved have already benchmarked on-farm carbon sequestration and are quantifying the benefit of ecosystem services delivered, to encourage further development of innovative, resilient and sustainable farm systems.

Initial carbon benchmarking in 2021 showed the sheep farms involved were emitting

an average of 34.2kg CO₂ equivalents/kg product. The system used for carbon benchmarking also accounts for on-farm carbon sequestration from soil and woodland, with the farms involved found to sequester an average of 43.8% of the CO₂e emitted by farming operations, resulting in a net average figure of 18.92kg CO₂e/kg product once sequestration has been accounted for.

Greenhouse gases

In terms of net whole farm emissions, sheep farmers within the network emitted an average of 579t CO₂e/year. Net whole farm emissions quantities were broken down into the respective greenhouse gases produced as an equivalent to carbon dioxide. Methane made up 57%, nitrous oxide 26% and carbon dioxide 17%.

Further analysis of the type and source of emissions indicated areas where high levels were prevalent, making it easier to target mitigations.

Emission sources

Enteric fermentation from sheep enterprises in the network made up 56% of whole farm emissions. Manure management produced up to 19% of emissions, while application of fertiliser made up 15% and purchased feed made up 6%. Fuel and other sources made up only 3% and 1% of whole farm emissions respectively.

After carbon benchmarking, seven farms were selected as case studies (see panels) to fully explore emissions sources on farm and develop practical measures that could be implemented to mitigate emissions.

[More at www.agrisearch.org/beacon-farmers](http://www.agrisearch.org/beacon-farmers).

Case study one



- Lowland sheep enterprise covering 180 acres (75ha).
- 700 Aberfield and Belclare ewes plus contract rearing of dairy heifers for a local dairy farmer.
- Growing spring barley for feed and willow for biomass production. Also a winter forage crop of kale for grazing ewes.
- Excellent grassland management with grass measured weekly and grass quality monitored to improve decision making.
- Fields regularly soil sampled and lime applied to maximise nutrient use efficiency.

After benchmarking the farm was found to emit 565,323kg CO₂e/year in 2021, which is 30% less than other UK benchmarked farms with similar enterprises. When soil carbon sequestration was accounted for, the net whole farm carbon footprint was found to reduce to 391,435kg CO₂e/year.

Recommendations to further reduce the farm's carbon footprint included slurry analysis twice a year, using low emission slurry spreading equipment, incorporating more clover into grassland, and carrying out a woodland and hedgerow audit to maximise carbon sequestration.

Case study two

- Upland beef and sheep system covering 260 acres (105ha).
- 70 Texel ewes, lambed inside, and 60 suckler cows.
- Good grassland management with a paddock grazing system and two good quality cuts of silage with slurry usage focused towards silage fields.

Following benchmarking the farm was found to emit 401,087kg CO₂e, which was 57% higher than similar enterprises. However, when soil carbon was taken into consideration, the farm was able to sequester 75% of the gross emissions, resulting in net whole farm emissions of 104,386kg. Notably the sheep enterprise made up only 10% of the farm's total carbon footprint.

Recommendations to further reduce emissions on farm included carrying out slurry analysis twice a year to tailor slurry applications to field requirements, applying slurry with a dribble bar or trailing shoe to reduce ammonia emissions, and incorporating more clover into grazing swards.



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Livestock Intelligence™

Understanding the law when dealing with a sheep worrying incident



Unfortunately, sheep worrying by dogs continues to be a challenge and it's difficult to know the best course of action when presented with the aftermath.

This article advises on the current law in England and Wales and provides some further tips if you find yourself a victim of sheep worrying.

Rebecca Ironmonger of Roythornes Solicitors comments: "The law that applies to livestock worrying is the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953. Under the Act, the owner or person in charge of a dog that worries livestock commits an offence, which in England and Wales could attract a fine of up to £1,000 plus costs and any compensation order made." Recent changes to Scottish legislation have seen fines of up to £40,000 and even prison sentences of up to 12 months.

Costs

Farmers are all too aware of the financial costs and emotional distress caused by sheep worrying incidents and it's frustrating most occurrences are caused by escaped dogs who's owners are unaware of their whereabouts. The remaining incidents are a result of irresponsible dog ownership, either not knowing how to control their dogs in the countryside or not understanding that any dog, no matter its temperament, can worry livestock if let off the lead in a field of sheep.

One area NSA continues to highlight to the public is the different forms of worrying, stressing dogs don't need to physically attack a sheep to cause harm.

Ms Ironmonger clarifies the law on this point. "Livestock worrying means attacking livestock, chasing livestock in such a way that could reasonably cause to the animal injury, suffering, abortion or loss or reduction in the animal's produce (for example milk), or being at large in a field/enclosure where there are sheep – for example not being on a lead or under close control," she says.

Rules

"Essentially, as long as your sheep are not trespassing on the land where they are worried, and that land falls under the definition of agricultural land, they will be covered by the 1953 Act. The exception is if the owner or occupier



The law says dogs must be on a lead or under close control around livestock.

of the land owns or is in charge of the dog and, therefore, the person in charge of the dog commits a criminal offence."

It's difficult to know what to do, especially in the heat of the moment, and one question that always comes up is around when a farm can legally shoot a dog that is worrying livestock

Ms Ironmonger says: "A dog can only be shot when it is an immediate danger to your livestock and there is no other reasonable option. Shooting an attacking dog should be a last resort. If the dog has already left the vicinity of your sheep, you cannot lawfully shoot it."

Compensation

Another topic of interest is compensation – but this only applies if a conviction is made. "When a defendant is found guilty of an offence and loss has been caused to the victim of the crime, the court must consider making a compensation order requiring the defendant to pay the victim a sum of money as compensation for the crime committed. For example, if the defendant's dog had attacked and killed five of your sheep and caused five more to abort, the court may make a compensation order in the value of five dead sheep and the expected value of the lambs, including any vets bills and disposal costs.

"Tell the police you want compensation to be considered and provide details of the losses suffered. The police officer in charge will then make the application to the court. The earlier you discuss compensation the better," concludes Ms Ironmonger.

More at www.sheepworrying.org.uk. Watch back last autumn's sheep worrying webinar at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars. Request specific information for Scotland and Northern Ireland via policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Livestock worrying victim checklist

1. Firm up any existing measures you have in place to protect your flock. Prevention is better than cure.
2. If worrying has happened, call the police to report it – however small the incident. The crime stats will only reflect the scale of the national problem if all cases are reported and given a crime reference number.
3. Gather your own evidence. Don't rely on the police to do this. If you have photographs, CCTV footage, vet reports, collate these and provide them to the police. Always keep a copy for yourself. This is critical as most prosecutions are not started or fail because of lack of evidence.
4. Keep a careful note of any financial losses sustained.
5. Get legal advice. NSA members get 30 minutes free legal help from Roythornes. Call NSA Head Office (details on page 2) for more details.

Future proofing a Powys mixed unit with a high-performance forage-based sheep enterprise

Sheep definitely have a future as an integral part of a mixed farming business under the new regimes, says Gary Orrells. "Our ewes and lambs are consistently delivering a high level of performance efficiency on our forage-based unit, and it's thanks to our Innovis genetics which are providing the anchor stone and enabling us to establish closed flocks.

"Aberfield cross Welsh ewes bred from our performance recorded Welsh flock are consistently scanning over 190% and rearing 180% to 185%, however, due to the 2022 dry conditions, scanning rates fell to 180%. We cross the ewes to the Abervale to produce finished lamb for Pilgrims/Waitrose; March born lambs are finished off forage or root crops within six to seven months to 19.5kg target with 60% in the R bracket and the remainder, E and U," explains Gary who farms with his son, Jonathan and daughter, Elin and in partnership with his wife, Anwen based near Abermule, Powys.

"Compared with the Welsh Mules we used to buy in, the Aberfield crosses are maturing at a smaller 65kg to 70kg, they're more easily maintained solely off forage for 11 months of the year to remain in BCS 3 to 3.5. We're achieving an average five lamb crops and these ewes have end of life value. Add together the benefits and introducing the Aberfield has enabled us to reduce inputs by 20%, and in turn contribute towards reduced emissions."

The Orrells' opportunity to develop a stratified closed flock came with the addition of marginal land rising to 1,400' and where Gary says the Welsh and Aberfield cross ewes thrive for 11 months of the year.

"We liked the Innovis vision; all its rams are forage bred and reared, they're lasting an average five seasons and they all come with EBVs which we firmly believe in using. Those rams are now our only bought in sheep and we like the fact they're all tested for MV and iceberg diseases. Apart from taking control of the flock's genetics, maintaining a closed flock has also enabled us to manage its health status. Biosecurity is vital."



Father and son team Jonathan (left) and Gary (right)

1,170 acres including 140 acres arable
500 Improved Welsh ewe split
200 ewes crossed to performance recorded Welsh rams
300 ewes crossed to the Aberfield
700 Aberfield cross ewes, split lambing crossed to the Abervale rams for finished lamb
140 suckler cows
Environmental schemes including biomass, PVs and turbines

Gary continues: "Both Innovis bred Abervale terminal sires and the Aberfield maternal sire have been bred for outdoor lambing management with finer heads and woolier skins. While we lamb indoors for logistical purposes, we turn out after 48 hours initially on to cash crops and find the lambs are more than capable of surviving. They require minimal intervention at lambing, lambs are vigorous and they're up and sucking within five to 10 minutes. The Aberfield's udders are well suspended, teats moderate sized, and we can hand milk them out to achieve an average 500ml per quarter of thick creamy milk. We have very few mastitis incidents."

Lambs are weighed monthly until June after which the frequency is stepped up to weekly. "I look for consistency, I want my sheep to perform like peas in a pod, and that's what I'm focused on breeding to ensure a future fit enterprise on our marginal land."

Early 2023 Ram Sale dates

Grass bred, performance recorded meat and maternal rams available

Exeter - 28th July
Kivells, Exeter Livestock Centre,
EX2 8FD

Aberystwyth - 3rd August
Peithyll, Capel Dewi, SY23 3HU

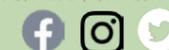
Ross on Wye - 11th August
RG & RB Williams, Ross Auction
Centre, DR9 7QF

Late August and September sales will be announced soon including sales in Scotland and North of England. Keep an eye on our website!

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www.innovis.org.uk

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Welsh pasture rejuvenation project shows yield and quality benefits



Using minimum tillage (min-till) techniques to rejuvenate tired pasture on a Farming Connect demonstration farm in North Wales has elevated the feed quality of grass.

Edward and Ellis Griffith farm at Bodwi and rent a block of land at Criccieth, both near Pwllheli, Gwynedd. They rotationally graze 1,170 Suffolk cross ewes, 320 ewe lambs and 125 Stabiliser suckler cows across 610 acres (247ha).

The rented block has not been cultivated for several decades, relying on regular applications of lime and fertiliser to keep it productive – but in recent years, grass yield and quality have been challenged by an incursion of moss.

Techniques

In June 2022, the father-and-son embarked on a project to rejuvenate the pasture with new grass varieties using min-till techniques including chain harrowing in combination with soil aeration.

Seed was introduced through direct drilling in three plots on 2.8ha where moss was particularly dominant. One plot was aerated and chain harrowed, harrowing only was used on another and the third was a control plot with no intervention.

Samples were first taken to assess the nutrient status of the soil and the results were reasonable,

except the potassium level was below optimal. Soil was also visually assessed and this identified little compaction issues.

The seed was drilled in June 2022 and the quality and quantity of the grass was then monitored throughout the growing season. As with most areas last summer, it proved to be a challenging growing season with exceptionally high and sustained temperatures and very limited rainfall.



Early samples showed the potassium and chloride uptake was greater on the treated areas and, later in the season, the whole macronutrient profile was slightly higher on the treated areas, with an improved cation anion balance relative to the control area.

“It was evidence the reseed was doing its job, as these trends suggest a grass sward in its

younger stages of growth,” says Non Williams, the Farming Connect officer who oversaw the trial.

Samples taken later in the season showed crude protein, D-value and ME content to be higher in both min-till plots compared to the control – see table.

Min-till

“Although these differences were small, they were consistent and once again indicate a younger sward,” says Dr Williams. “The trial demonstrated the value of min-till. Aeration and harrowing gave a marginally better result than harrowing alone, likely due to aeration scratching the soil surface and removing some thatch. Harrowing alone gave some benefit and is cheaper. As a result, the sward in the min-till plots had a higher feed value.”

Although the differences were not statistically significant, Dr Williams says this was likely a result of the challenging growing season.

Grassland renewal with min-till or no-till establishment methods is increasing in popularity as farmers look to improve their soil management and organic matter content.

Dr Williams says: “Rejuvenating older pastures by over-sowing can be an effective approach for improving pasture productivity and quality without the financial and environmental burden of ploughing.”

Trial results.

Sample	No intervention	Harrow-only	Harrow and aeration
Digestibility (D value)	61.7	62.4	62.9
Crude protein (%)	17.5	20.8	21.4
Metabolisable energy (MJ/kg)	9.7	9.8	9.9



Tips for min-till or no-till field prep

- Sample the soil. A recent test is crucial before getting started.
- Always evaluate soil condition by digging holes to assess it visually.
- Use the condition of the soil as an indicator of which level of intervention is most appropriate. It might simply be rest and recovery, or harrowing, aeration or subsoiling.
- Don't expect sward rejuvenation to give the same results as a full reseed but it will offer multiple benefits, including on cost and possibly not disturbing the soil if it is not needed.

Large-scale bracken control is difficult on steep ground with limited vehicle access.

Bracken control – are we fighting a losing battle?

By Hamish Waugh, sheep farmer

An average of only 5,000ha (7,400 acres) of bracken has been sprayed in the UK each year since 2014.

Although this figure would be slightly higher if it included cutting, rolling bruising and other physical control methods of the invasive weed, with bracken areas expanding at around 2% each year, a figure of 1.5m ha results in an annual increment of around 30,000ha per year.

That strongly suggests the UK is losing the battle to control bracken, which the NSA and other organisations find concerning. From personal experience, I know bracken severely limits the productivity of areas that could carry grazing livestock, it makes it difficult to manage upland grazing, particularly at gathering time, it harbours ticks and other pests and, in areas where it is expanding, creates a monoculture that has limited value to biodiversity and nature.

Reducing expansion

NSA isn't alone in arguing bracken expansion should be stopped and, if that could be achieved, a further conversation should be had about reducing its prevalence. So why are we finding this weed increasing hard to keep control of?

Having lived alongside bracken for my lifetime of farming in Dumfriesshire, I am regularly amazed by how well the plant does in fertile soils. It commonly reaches heights of 1.5m (5ft) and what grows beneath the ground can be truly amazing.

When an underground bunker was built near us during the Cold War a hole dug more than 5m deep was still unearthing bracken roots.

I also recall discussion at a Bracken Control Group (BCG) meeting where it was agreed the root system and weight of rhizomes under each

hectare of a well-established bracken bed could be 300t or more.

There are many options available when it comes to control, from hand-pulling of fronds to helicopter spraying.

Crushing and cutting will reduce the plant's ability to transfer the energy captured by the bracken fronds during the growing season to the rhizomes in the autumn. The plant then remains dormant for the winter.

Spraying produces the fastest results, but even then, you will not see any response until the year after, when no new shoots appear. In the long term, a policy of follow-up treatment is vital if control of the plant is to be maintained.



Glyphosate will kill bracken well but, as it is non-selective, will kill all plants it encounters. Therefore, its main role in bracken control is as the chemical used in a well-calibrated weed-wiper. Using this technique will ensure non-weed plants are not accidentally destroyed.

For larger areas of bracken on steep ground with no vehicle access, asulam is the only currently viable control option. It is the active ingredient in Asulox, the only bracken control herbicide on the market.

Asulam is sprayed onto bracken, often by helicopter, but possibly by drone in the future.

A brief history of the bracken fern

- One of the oldest plants on earth, found in fossils dating back 55 million years.
- Commonplace throughout the world for at least 24 million years.
- Formerly used as cattle bedding as, when dried, it is very absorbent – but also poisonous to cattle if consumed over time.
- 150 years ago many shepherds would have been contracted, post-shearing, to use a scythe to cut an acreage of bracken and gather up the dried fronds.
- Dried bracken was sold to brickmakers, as it burns at temperatures required to fire the bricks. In turn, the ash was used as a mordant in the soap manufacturing industry.

As it is a more selective herbicide, it has a small impact on only a few non-target species, leaving the majority of desirable plants free to grow and flourish.

Authorisation

Due to concerns about food safety, asulam has not been approved for use under the EU regulations since 2011. But for the 2012 season and every year since, its use has been allowed under an annual Emergency Authorisation. BCG submits an annual application to the chemicals regulation division of the Health and Safety Executive for this.

Simon Thorp, BCG Director and consultant to the Heather Trust, would be first to admit obtaining approval every year is becoming more of a challenge as time goes by – but myself and all farmers striving to keep on top of bracken are very grateful asulam remains an important part of the arsenal in our battle.

More at www.brackencontrol.co.uk.

Sheep grazing can be used to aid clover establishment if managed correctly.



GRASSLAND FOCUS



Reap the rewards of establishing clover in existing grass leys

While nitrogen prices remain high, many sheep producers are considering their options for efficient forage production for the coming season.

The incorporation of nitrogen-fixing legumes, particularly clover, into existing swards is a viable option for both supporting grass growth and increasing protein supply.

Establishing white clover into an existing sward requires keen attention to detail to ensure good establishment. As a small seed, white clover has a minimal sowing depth of 5-10mm and is commonly broadcast following scarification, rather than sown, although careful shallow slot seeding can work well. Temperature is important for both germination and rhizobial activity so from April to August would be suitable.

Bare soil

If 20-40% bare soil is visible in the sward base, livestock can be used to tread seed in while grazing the grass down fairly hard to limit competition to the emerging seedlings – but ensure the ground is well scarified beforehand to ensure good seed-to-soil contact, as the seed will absorb the moisture needed for germination directly from the soil particles and must avoid being dried out by the sun and wind. Seed rates of around 4kg/ha may be needed as germination is likely to be limited compared to a fresh seedbed.

Smaller-leaved varieties are best suited to sheep grazing and the Recommended Grass and Clover Lists (RGCL) for England and Wales

provides a list of seeds, most of which can be purchased from a range of merchants.

New varieties are added to the RGCL each year and must offer a clear improvement to the mean average of the current list to gain a place, continually raising the bar on yield potential, growth, ground cover under light and hard defoliation throughout the season. Varieties no longer on the RGCL can still be sold so are often included in commercial mixes. Aim for RGCL varieties where good yields and grazing tolerance are priorities.



Use of clover in leys could offer increased benefits as forage.

Most fields will have an endemic population of the particular rhizobia needed but some that haven't had clover for many years may benefit from inoculation of the seed.

If swards need clearing of annual and perennial weeds, it is advised to do so prior to clover establishment. There are some clover-safe herbicides on the market but not as many as there were. Any herbicide should be avoided while the new plants are small and tender.

Grazing of the clover seedlings can aid successful establishment if done in short, intensive sessions of three to four days a month while grass is actively growing, as this reduces competition from the grass. Better establishment may be achieved after grass growth slows in July, as long as there is sufficient moisture, which is more of a gamble these days.

Diverse swards

Other species can also be incorporated into existing leys but results can be variable depending on soil and weather conditions. More diverse swards are usually more successful as a newly established ley. The species to include will depend on the characteristics of the individual field, livestock type and grazing behaviour with different results achieved year on year. This is where a long term, experimental approach can work well to determine combinations that work best.

Simpler mixtures of ryegrass, red clover, chicory and ribwort plantain are found to be effective for growing lambs in particular, not least because of the anthelmintic effect of the chicory, and can be a good first step to building confidence in alternative species. Chicory and plantain are both deep rooting, drought tolerant and have higher trace element levels and have been found to work well in recent dry summers when forage levels get short.

Email ellie.sweetman@niab.com to get involved in a project to increase diversity in permanent pasture and short term leys, or to register interest in open days.



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How to make the most of available grass this year via paddock grazing

By Sara Gregson, contributor

Paddock grazing produces more grass of higher feeding quality, eaten in greater quantities by livestock.

Research suggests a 92% increase in grass yield by paddock grazing in comparison to set stocking, with utilisation rising to 80% as opposed to 50%.

The main reason for the rise in grass growth is that it is given a rest period, simply by moving the stock into a different area of the field. And if grazing pressure is tightened by erecting temporary electric fences, more of the grown grass will be eaten.

If the cost of buying in an extra 3.9t DM/ha of feed is compared with buying fencing and troughs that will last five years or more, many would argue it is worth any perceived hassle of moving the sheep regularly through the season.

Ben Anthony is a sheep farmer near Whitland, Carmarthenshire. Always driving for greater productivity and efficiency, he started paddock grazing his ewes and lambs five years ago.

Set stocking

"We used to run more but smaller mobs of ewes and lambs that were spread across the whole farm in a set-stock environment," says Mr Anthony. "They could be in one field for a long period of time that did not allow the fields to rest."

"We decided this was an area of the business we could develop and trialled paddock grazing for one year. It made a massive difference to grass and lamb growth and, in turn, profit."

Mr Anthony runs a flock of 400 Aberfield ewes and 100 Abermax ewes on 250 acres (100ha) of

owned and rented land. For the past three years he has been breeding around 180 forage-fed rams annually to sell commercially. This is from an entirely grass-based system, with no creep fed to any lambs. In-lamb ewes are fed a total mixed ration pre-lambing. Post lambing they are turned out to grass with no concentrates.

He has put in place a grazing system not unlike that used by some low-cost dairy farmers. All the fields have been sub-divided into five acre (2ha) paddocks using a solar energiser, temporary electric fencing posts and three strands of polywire. Mobile water troughs are fed from pipes laid out on the surface of the ground.

Management

Mr Anthony regularly uses an independent adviser for guidance on getting the most from his grass. They measure grass growth through the season, uploading the information into an online tool designed to help make decisions about grass supply and demand.

"In the first year we moved three or four mobs of 120 ewes and lambs every three days, and the effect on grass growth was incredible," Mr Anthony says. "Our best fields now grow up to 13t DM/ha per year."

"We leave the paddocks to recover for three weeks before going back in. Any fields producing too much for the sheep to graze is made into high quality silage, which we feed to the ewes at lambing. We always have excess silage, which we sell to local dairy farmers."

"Now we are a little more experienced we tend to move the mobs every five days. We have to find the balance between what is good for grass

Pros and cons of paddock grazing

- + Higher forage production and use per hectare.
- + Produces high-quality feed.
- + Allows high stocking rates.
- + Provides more even manure distribution.
- + Encourages weed control through more even grazing.
- + Reduces the need for conserved forage by extending the grazing season.
- Requires careful monitoring of forage supply and measuring.
- Initial set-up costs include fencing and water provision.
- More frequent management is required.

growth and what is good for lamb growth. I think we have found the sweet spot.

"I like temporary fencing because it offers flexibility. I can easily move it to drill a winter crop of swedes, cut a crop of grass for silage or sow a multi-species ley."

Using electric

"This year I have bought a new fencing system for a 40-acre (16ha) block of neighbouring land we have started renting. We have split it into seven blocks and have invested in a new solar energiser that is the most powerful option on the market. It means I don't have to carry independent batteries around, as it is all self-contained," he adds.

Mr Anthony had found his homebred sheep are now used to the electric fencing and their lambs learn quickly.

"Mob grazing is a bit like mowing the lawn. You know as soon as it's been cut it will start growing again, and that's what we are doing with our living lawn mowers," he says. "It's allowing us to grow more grass, of better quality with fewer inputs, including high-priced fertiliser."

"We've knocked back lambing this year to mid-March, rather than mid-February, allowing us to turn them out when more grass is growing to reduce some of the feed given to the ewes. It's all about trying to find ways to run a lower cost, efficient system – and rotational grazing fits our system perfectly."



Paddock grazing has made Mr Anthony's ewe enterprise more efficient.

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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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GPS trackers are attached to the sheep to monitor their location.

Research examines use of virtual fencing for improving grazing management

Virtual fencing has the potential to radically transform the way we manage grazing livestock.

In just a few years this technology has gone from concept to reality, with a handful of companies worldwide developing and selling virtual fencing. AFBI is running an extensive research programme with the aim of answering key questions on using the technology and its impact on animal health and welfare.

Virtual fencing uses a combination of GPS technology and sensory cues to keep livestock in a desired area, without the need for physical fences. There are typically two main parts to the system – a virtual fence collar fitted on the animal's neck and a mobile app to map out the GPS boundary (the virtual fence) around the grazing area.

When the animal approaches the virtual fence an audio cue alerts it to alter its direction away from the fence. This is followed by an electric pulse if the animal proceeds to pass beyond the virtual fence. The principle is based on associative learning, whereby animals learn to respond to the audio cue alone, avoiding the pulse.

In practice

Over the past two grazing seasons AFBI has examined virtual fencing, demonstrating it can successfully contain animals in a range of grazing systems with varying stocking densities and different levels of grass availability.

An electric pulse has the potential to cause pain and distress to an animal, so this research has placed a major emphasis on assessing if virtual fencing is ethically acceptable.

Overall, most animals rapidly learned to respond to the audio cue within the first few days of training. Initial findings show no extreme behavioural reactions to virtual fencing, and similar levels of stress hormone in virtual fenced

and electric fenced cattle. Sheep studies in spring 2023 will look at this in more detail, including comparisons between hill and lowland sheep in virtual fencing systems.

Challenges

From a practical perspective, there have been no issues with GPS drift (the difference between the animals actual location and the location recorded by the virtual fence collar), and network coverage (currently relied upon by virtual fencing systems) is generally good across the AFBI Hillsborough research farm. There is however a small low-lying area on the farm (surrounded by steep hills and woodland) where network coverage is patchy, meaning collars are slow to load when the virtual fence line is moved. Developments are underway to overcome network availability issues but this may be a limiting factor in certain areas.

By Dr Conor Holohan, AFBI **afbi** AGRI-FOOD & BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE

Battery life varied depending on factors such as grazing intensity and season. Virtual fence collars are typically fitted with a rechargeable battery unit, with some manufacturers incorporating small solar panels on the collar unit to help maintain battery charge. In an intensive sheep grazing scenario it is broadly estimated batteries would last a minimum of two months before recharging is necessary.

The research indicates virtual fencing can be an effective and ethically acceptable technology for use with grazing livestock. Although the current number of farms using virtual fencing in the UK and Ireland is relatively small, it could become commonplace in the coming years, particularly as the technology is further refined and improved and systems become more affordable.

This AFBI project is funded by Daera, Horizon 2020 and the HEA North-South Research Initiative.

Benefits of virtual fencing

- Reduced labour associated with maintaining and movement of conventional fencing.
- Ability to introduce temporary fencing in areas where physical fencing may not be feasible, such as mountainous terrain, short-term rented land or silage fields only grazed for a part of the year.
- Improved pasture management and feed utilisation through rotational grazing, strip grazing and more regular movements.
- Enhanced monitoring of individual animals within a flock. Animal movements and real-time positioning are available to view on the mobile app.
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Vaccinating ewes before lambing can pass on antibodies to unborn lambs.

A vet's guide to the prevention of clostridial disease in lambs

vetPartners

Clostridial disease poses a serious threat to unvaccinated sheep – but with vaccines costing as little as 50p a head, Colin Greer of Abbey Vets, Lanarkshire, says it's not a risk worth taking this season.

While vaccine supply issues are still being reported by manufacturers, Mr Greer says to discuss this with your vets, and use alternatives where possible.

The National Office for Animal Health categorises vaccination for clostridial disease as the highest priority for sheep, suggesting flocks should be vaccinated as a default unless vets deem otherwise.

Vaccine shortages have been blamed on the regulatory changes and logistical issues caused by Brexit, which manufacturers claim reduced safety stocks.

Mr Greer says: "If your usual vaccine is unavailable, speak to your vet about finding the next best alternative."

Most vaccines require ewes to be given a booster two to eight weeks before lambing to ensure their offspring obtain sufficient passive immunity, whereby antibodies are transferred from the ewe to her lambs.

Protection

"The duration of protection differs depending on which vaccine is used and the type of clostridial disease," explains Mr Greer, emphasising the need to know the appropriate action for both ewes and lambs.

"Typically, passive immunity against blackleg, the most common clostridial disease, only lasts about two weeks, so don't delay in vaccinating lambs with their primary course. Get in as early as you can to make sure lambs have protection.

Most vaccines can be used from three weeks of age," he advises.

Vaccine timing can be difficult to coordinate when catering to a wide age range of lambs, but Mr Greer suggests discussing timescales with your vet.

"If you can do them in groups, then do them, or, if you can't, consider when your biggest risk period is and treat lambs before this," he adds.

"It's about speaking to your vet and deciding the best timing for your flock. The biggest danger is thinking you don't have clostridial disease and doing nothing."

Blackleg

Mr Greer says he commonly sees blackleg on farms that have never had previous issues. He warns: "You can go years without an issue but then start using a new field, for example, which could result in an outbreak.

Good colostrum management is also key to ensuring lambs receive adequate protection within the first few weeks of life. "If you vaccinate your ewes, but lambs don't get enough colostrum, they won't get protection," warns Mr Greer.

He says lambs must have 50ml/kg of birthweight within the first two hours of birth. For example, lambs weighing 4kg must drink at least 200ml.

Mr Greer explains it's not easy to quantify this, but a simple test is checking the lamb has a full belly. "Colostrum must also be good quality and, to test this, use a refractometer to ensure colostrum offered measures more than 22%."

Six main types of clostridial disease

- Lamb dysentery
- Pulpy kidney
- Blackleg
- Black disease
- Braxy
- Tetanus

Organisms that cause clostridial diseases most commonly live in the soil.



It is not necessary to test every ewe. A percentage of the flock is adequate depending on flock size, as well as how many groups are run and how many rations are fed.

"By the time you have colostrum, there's not a lot you can do about it. You've got what you've got. But if colostrum is poor quality, and there are still more ewes to lamb, you can adjust their diets, or it might be a good reason to vaccinate lambs early," he says.

"In my view, there's no substitute for ewe colostrum and seeing that lamb up and suckling in the first few hours."

Post mortem

Sudden deaths should always be investigated with a post mortem. Mr Greer says: "You will get an answer quickly with clostridial disease, but previous poor experiences can act as a deterrent. Often, the first time the post mortem comes back inconclusive, which is frustrating. But if you don't do the first one you can't do the second, so I'd encourage people not to give up.

"Finding out what hasn't caused the death can be just as important as finding out what has. Remember, it's important to get carcasses sent off as quickly as possible to get the best results and, if possible, keep them cool to prevent decomposition.

Understanding clostridial disease

Clostridial diseases are caused by organisms called clostridia that live in the environment, most commonly soil, for a long period of time. Most of the organisms occur naturally in the gut of a healthy animal and pasture becomes contaminated via faeces.

During stressful events, the chemistry of an animal's intestines changes, which can trigger the rapid multiplication of bacteria and the release of toxins. These organisms can also enter via wounds.

Mr Greer says: "Generally you will know if you have it, but the disease can be triggered by doing something different, like buying a new field, cutting silage from a new field or digging up the ground and releasing the spores. Blackleg is by far the most common and usually affects young growing animals."

Each type of clostridial disease presents different symptoms but the most common one is sudden death, rendering treatment futile in most cases.

"You can treat with antibiotics. But blackleg, for instance, kills off the muscle and causes the animal to grow in unfavourable ways, so prevention is always best," says Mr Greer.

For more information and treatment advice, speak to your vet.



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Maximising funding to complete a useful Worming Treatment Check

By Lesley Stubbings, independent sheep consultant



Given how vital an effective wormer is to good worm control, a wormer treatment check is an important step for sheep flocks.

It is not a definitive test for anthelmintic resistance, but does start you on a path to understanding which wormer groups are working effectively on your farm.

Funding

This is true regardless of your location, flock size or enterprise type. But the good news for sheep farmers in England is, at the current time, you can access funding to do a check – through the Defra Animal Health & Welfare Pathway.

Pathway is offering sheep producers £436 to cover the cost of a vet-led health and welfare review visit and a Worming Treatment Check

(WTC). You have six months to complete these from the date of registration.

Initially, only existing Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) claimants are eligible and you will only be able to claim for one class of livestock (sheep, beef, pigs or dairy). In time, you will be able to claim for multiple species and non-BPS recipients will also qualify.

The objective of the review is to get your vet on the farm to discuss the health and disease priorities for the flock. The vet will conduct the review and then provide a report highlighting agreed priorities and outline a plan of action. The main thing to remember is you agree with your vet how you will get the best output from the money available. The WTC is part of the review – but needs good planning and timing to make the most of the funding.



Sampling kits and instructions will be posted for you to sample your flock.

It is very important the WTC is carried out at an appropriate time, for example when there are lambs at pasture with a FEC that indicates they require treatment. A minimum FEC of 250 eggs per gram is suggested. To gain the most from the WTC you need to work with your vet to monitor FECs in the run up to the test.

The WTC must be carried out by an accredited laboratory, listed on the Defra website. The lab will send out kits with instructions enabling you to collect your own samples to post back, then a report will be provided to you and your vet on analysis.

On the basis of the results, you can discuss product choices with your vet and/or adviser and look at how you can use ongoing FEC monitoring to improve worm control in your flock. Remember, it takes a series of these tests over different years and seasons to build a complete picture of the efficacy of wormers on a farm, so use this opportunity as a starting point and build on it.

More at www.scops.org.uk/treatmentcheck.

Testing

The WTC is designed to determine if an anthelmintic (wormer) treatment has worked effectively. A faecal egg count (FEC) at the time of treatment is used as a measure of the number of adult roundworms present in the sheep before treatment. A second FEC is taken at a set interval after treatment and the difference in the FEC determines how effective the treatment has been at killing the worms in the sheep.



Discuss the best time to carry out the WTC with your vet.

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Controlling the spread of sheep scab in the Western Isles

By Stew Burgess, Moredun 

A Scottish Government-funded project means Moredun is working closely with the Lewis & Harris Sheep Producers Association and local crofters to co-design methods for sustainable, best-practice control of sheep scab.

The project on the Isles of Lewis and Harris will address the problem that early stages of scab infestations are often not obvious and sheep can appear clinically normal for several weeks, during which time they can be quite innocently moved around, spreading the infection. The work will take advantage of the development of an Elisa blood test for sheep scab by Moredun, which can detect the disease before the appearance of clinical signs. It means scab can be identified before it has a chance to spread, allowing targeted and coordinated treatments to achieve long-lasting control.

Treatment

Treatment of scab relies on organophosphate plunge dips and macrocyclic lactone (ML) injectables. However, populations of scab mites resistant to the MLs have now been confirmed across the UK. As such, it is imperative these treatments are only used when needed and make a concerted effort to bring scab under control. The Elisa test detects antibodies to a protein found only in the sheep scab mite, meaning the test can accurately detect whether an

infestation is due to the scab mite or another ectoparasite, such as lice. This provides crucial information, as the treatments for different parasites can vary. The test can detect the presence of mites within two weeks of infestation and before the onset of clinical signs.

Moredun has been working with partners across all four UK nations to benchmark the use of the blood test in local, regional and national control programmes. The institute works closely with government agencies, funding bodies, farmers and industry to demonstrate a more sustainable method of controlling the disease through serological testing.

Testing

This Lewis and Harris project offered free sheep scab blood testing during scanning in February 2023. Vets from a local practice in Stornoway, Ross-shire, collected blood samples from 12 sheep per flock, with nearly 100 farmers participating.

Any flocks that tested positive received free treatment advice and reasonable treatment costs were covered to ensure animals were treated in a timely and coordinated manner. Plans for follow-up testing and coordinated treatments of hot-spot areas identified through the blood screening will take place later in autumn/winter.

We're delighted so many sheep-keepers signed up to this initiative because, with a disease like scab, it's very important people act in a coordinated way to get on top of the problem.



Scab testing was offered free during February scanning.

Sheep scab fact file

- Caused by infestation with a parasitic mite.
- Characterised by yellowish skin lesions (scabs) and accompanied by restlessness, scratching, loss of wool, bleeding wounds and loss of condition.
- Reduces animal performance (loss of ewe condition, poor lamb growth rate, reduced quality skins and wool damage) and causes significant welfare problems.
- Consistently identified as one of the most important diseases, in terms of impact on finance and welfare. Estimated to cost the UK sheep industry more than £80m annually.
- Difficult to control due to rapid spread of infestation, through direct contact and transfer of mites via fleece strands, fence posts, machinery and people working with infected sheep.
- Sheep can appear clinically normal when first infested, making early detection difficult.

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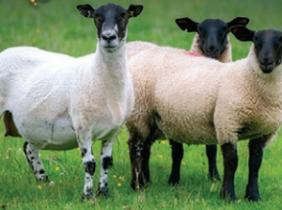
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Following the flock

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

Matt Bagley

NSA Central Region Chair, Lincolnshire

As Lincoln University Farm & Estate Manager I'm excited to see our sheep flock increase this year to 300 ewes.

We have introduced Cheviot Mules and Cheviot Mule cross Texels to compare to the North Country Mule and Texel Mules on lifetime production statistics.

The sheep tugged surprisingly well after the hard summer and had a pleasing scanning. They stayed out until mid-January having been on stubble turnips and grass leys from November. Once inside the sheep have had silage we made last April from grass drilled in early September following winter wheat. Forage maize was then strip tilled in the same field in May.

Lambing has thrown some pleasing lambs so far. The University held its annual lambing event in early March in aid of Lincolnshire Rural Support Network, with 1,200 visitors enjoying the day. Seeing the general public interact with lambs and witness them being born is magical to be involved with.

We have a busy spring and summer ahead with the hope of reseeded some of the permanent pasture with more herbal leys. Lambs will be finished over the summer with a mixture of liveweight, deadweight and lamb box sales.



It's all change for Kevin, moving to a lower input flock

Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chair, Gloucestershire

The farm I manage has been in the doldrums of probate for more than two years; while this has allowed time to reflect, it is exciting to now be able to implement change.

I've farmed North Country Mules for over 30 years with our high input, high output system dependent on a good lamb price and a good ewe performance and lambing percentage, which we have nearly always had.

Mules don't come without issues, but they have fulfilled a role here and I am fond of them. But it is now becoming increasingly more challenging on our marginal hill farm to justify high inputs, not to mention the hard work.

The purchase of 74 Exlana shearlings last autumn and 100 ewe lambs in January sees us dipping a leg into the water of shedding sheep, outdoor lambing and low inputs. This has taken a lot of getting my head around and will take me out of my comfort zone - but I'm up for the challenge. I am lambing the remainder of my Mules as I write this, and wonder if it will be the last time I see them lambing?

The challenges of finding animal medicines this year has become very concerning, especially vaccinations. As medicine companies look for other avenues with better profits, animal medicine seems to get forgotten about and, with the challenges of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate's consultation on the Veterinary Medicine Regulations looming, I fear it could only get worse.



Winter stubbles gave Matt's ewes adequate nutrition in the lead up to lambing.

Alastair Armstrong

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chair, Co. Fermanagh

We had a busy autumn selling our breeding stock and sourcing new stock rams to provide a change of blood.

Tugging fever took hold throughout October and November with 150 Park type North Country Cheviots going to pedigree rams, 150 Hill type going to pure Hill North Country Cheviot rams and a further 50 ewes going to a Border Leicester to produce Scotch Halfbreds.

We were delighted with our scanning with a 3% barren rate throughout the flocks. Our Park type ewes scanned more than 180% and the Hill type ewes scanned more than 160%, thankfully with very few triplets. We've installed a polytunnel suitable for holding approximately 100 ewes, which should be a major help this lambing time and take pressure off if the weather turns bad.

In February we hosted our second annual in-lamb sale of North Country Cheviots along with the Kilvaddy Flock with a strong demand and good average. Strong ewes sold to 2,200gns.

I have also been a part of the Sheep Task Force here in Northern Ireland, involved with producing a report on its vision for the future of the industry. The report underlines the importance of sheep production to our economy and calls for collaboration between government, meat processors and farmers to ensure the industry has a stable and sustainable future.



For the second year running, Alastair had a farm sale of in-lamb Cheviots.

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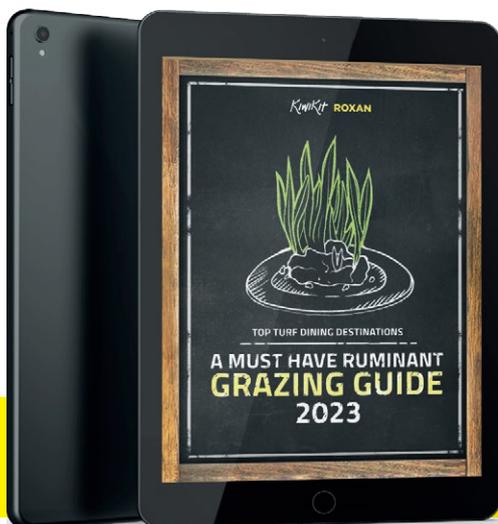
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