

SHEEPFARMER

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NSA EVENTS

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The tale of the physicist and the chauffeur



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

This year didn't deliver a dreadful spring by anyone's count, although the wet and cold March made it feel like a long time coming.

But its behind us now and, barring any unexpected climatic conditions between writing this and reading it, the swallows will be back in force, the grass growing like fury, and hopefully lambs growing in a similar fashion.

Climate change may have made weather conditions more unpredictable, but we can still (hopefully) trust our seasons will come and go and the UK's ability to grow bountiful supplies of grass, crops and food will remain.

Our favourable growing conditions and fertile soils must surely have played a part in Britain becoming a strong and influential nation, with a large population, and over centuries this has made us a farming nation.

Farming has framed our landscapes, our wildlife and ecology, and our cultures and rural communities. It's almost inevitable that when something is successful it brings a risk of things getting out of balance - and most readers would accept there are many examples where, in hindsight and in some places, that balance was lost. In truth you might ask if it was ever perfect, and if it was then it would have been more by default than design.

Balance

In trying to achieve some acceptable form of balance in land use, it must be important to consider our most fundamental needs as human beings - to have a roof over our heads, to stay warm and dry, to be adequately fed and watered, to have clean air to breathe, and to be emotionally content. Meeting these requirements will help us fend off disease and keep us healthy.

Never has food, farming and land use been so intensely debated and contested, and in land we are considering a resource that is finite. We can't make more of it, yet our needs and demands get greater. It's like the mother of all parties for policy wonks and lobbying campaigners, most of whom

have an agenda at heart.

What we do know is it's remarkably easy to create a picture of utopia when nothing is in place to be disputed. Protecting things that already exist is hard because it's easy to pick on practical examples to criticise, usually without having to consider the full picture.

This is all playing out right now in our hills and uplands, and nowhere more than on Dartmoor, although relevant to most of our uplands and other grassland regions where arguments over land use, habitat quality, farming activities and stocking rates, not to mention overall objectives of what different interest groups want, have been in full swing. The outcome so far, following the April debate in the House of Commons on farming on Dartmoor, is the promise of an independent public inquiry.

Storytelling

I'm reminded of a chapter in the book *The Art of Thinking Clearly* by Rolf Dobelli, where it tells the story of a chauffeur who takes a physicist to speak on quantum mechanics at conferences. Having heard him deliver his presentation numerous times they conjure up a plan that the chauffeur delivers the presentation at the next conference. All goes well and the chauffeur delivers a convincing talk until someone asks a question - whereupon the real expert has to be called on.

This story shows the holders of real knowledge are those who do it and experience it, not those that read the theory books in their armchairs, with the ability to put on a good show.

That might point to practical farmers having a stronger voice or getting greater recognition than some of the slick presenters we have heard from recently, but here I return to something I've said since I took on this role at NSA - we have to get better at owning the 'whole'.

As well as being sheep producers we have to be the environmentalists and the animal welfare enthusiasts. We have to be the ones who are passionate about our natural resources and we have to take this role seriously and be prepared to evidence what we are saying and doing.



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Official NSA AGM notification

Notice is hereby given that the 130th Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association will be held on Saturday 12th August, 11am at Rutland Stud, Saxon Street, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 9RS, by kind permission of the Godolphin Management Co.

An additional online joining option will be provided (details nearer the time) but this will be subject to the internet connection on the day. The AGM will transact the following business:

- To approve the minutes of the 129th AGM.
- To receive and adopt the Trustees Report and Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2022.
- To elect officers for the ensuing year (President and Honorary Treasurer), Vice President(s) and auditors.

By order of the Board, members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form or to appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by 11am on Thursday 10th August 2023. Attendance is open to all, but only NSA members can vote at the AGM.

Godolphin is kindly opening its gates from 10.30am, to allow ample arrival time, and will also provide a farm walk afterwards. Visitors will see worldclass thoroughbred racehorses managed alongside the high performing, Mule-based sheep flock managed by NSA Chair Dan Phipps.

On the same day, Godolphin is also hosting the NSA Eastern Region Next Generation event, to which AGM attendees are welcome to watch and support. Refreshments will be available to purchase. There is no requirement to register attendance for any element of the day in advance.

Event details and proxy forms can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.



NSA Chair Dan Phipps and his partner Lynne.

NSA Welsh Sheep attracts the crowds

As this issue of *Sheep Farmer* was winging its way to members, many of you will have been enjoying the return of the NSA Welsh Sheep event.

Hosted by the Owen family on their family farm in Newtown, Powys, the beautiful surroundings were an added bonus to an event offering seminars, demonstrations, many trade and breed society stands and, a real highlight, the farm tour showcasing the farm's quality livestock.

Phil Stocker comments: "What a fantastic event! It was clear everyone had a good day. Congratulations to the organising team, especially to Event Organiser Helen Roberts. And thanks of course go to the Owen family for their generous hospitality." A full report of the event will feature in the next edition of *Sheep Farmer*.



Visitors flocked to NSA Welsh Sheep.

NSA welcomes new faces and new systems

The NSA Trustees have welcomed a new face, with NSA Scottish Region's nomination of Pamela Nicol of Glenisla, Angus, accepted at the May meeting.

Pamela replaces Aileen McFadzean of Perth, Central Scotland, on the NSA Board and starts a three-year term of office as one of 14 Trustee Directors.

Meantime at NSA Head Office, Diana Smith has joined the staff team as NSA Membership Officer in charge of subscription administration.

To reduce the number of trees sacrificed for NSA membership paperwork, and to maximise the amount of income spent on policy and technical matters rather than administration, more subscription correspondence will become digital over the next year. This will be a slow transition and one that will be made easier by members keeping NSA updated with their current email address.

If you do not currently receive the NSA Weekly Email Update please send a message to membership@nationalsheep.org.uk.



Pamela Nicol.



Diana Smith.



British lamb was enjoyed by guests at the coronation in May.

Coronation celebrated with British lamb

NSA was pleased to see British lamb top of the menu as part of the official celebrations marking King Charles III's coronation.

Used in a recipe from celebrity chef Ken Hom, who stated the dish 'represented the hallmark of modern Great Britain', its inclusion was a reminder of King Charles' values and his enjoyment of lamb.

When he was the Prince of Wales, Charles' support of UK sheep farmers and his love of sheep meat are well documented – and NSA enjoyed working with him via the Mutton Renaissance and Campaign for Wool.

Webinars continue to pass on useful advice

Having so far this year covered the topics of sustainable parasite control and sheep scab, NSA's continued partnership with Moredun will welcome members and other interested parties to another webinar this summer, to discuss sheep vaccines.

Issues with vaccine supply in recent years have highlighted their value, and this will be an opportunity to discuss this as well as what may be available in the future. Speakers include Dr Fiona Lovatt, sheep veterinary specialist, and Alasdair Nisbet, Head of Vaccines and Diagnostics at Moredun. Tune in to the webinar on Wednesday 28th June at 7.30pm. *More details and a registration link at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.*

Upgrade membership and save this summer

As NSA event season continues, members are reminded they can receive free entry to events for two people living at the same address if they upgrade their subscription to a joint membership. Joint membership is £10 more for the year and includes both members receiving the NSA Weekly Email Update. *Contact NSA Head Office or find details at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-community.*

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Industry preparation for attestations

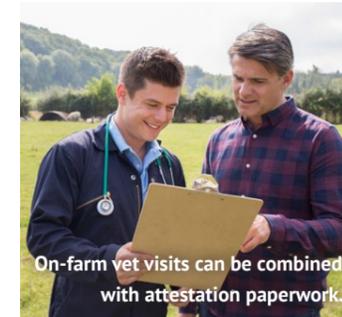
In response to the post-Brexit requirements around exports health certificates, NSA is working with Defra and other industry bodies to find a workable solution for vet attestations.

Despite the welcome extension to December 2023, time is running out for the many sheep farms selling products that end up in export markets.

A simple system is needed for vet attestations stating a farm is free of disease and to a level of biosecurity required to export products to the EU – hence NSA's involvement in another working group meeting in early May, followed by Defra speaking on the topic at NSA Sheep South West in mid-May.

An agreed attestation form is already available at gov.uk and farmers are encouraged to get vets to go through this process during any routine visit that take place now, as it will be a requirement to conduct this at least annually.

It should also be noted that membership of the main national farm assurance schemes qualifies as being compliant without the need for a standalone vet attestation. Questions remain over the transfer of vet attestations through the supply chain but NSA is confident this will become clearer sooner rather than later. *More on vet attestations on page 10.*



On-farm vet visits can be combined with attestation paperwork.

New government Net Zero Growth plan

In April the government published its 'Net Zero Growth' plan, which is part of the Powering Up Britain programme developed under the brief of Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Energy Security & Net Zero, to bolster the UK economy while meeting the government target for the UK to be net zero.

NSA is considering the plan in detail and its relevance to the sheep sector – but what is of interest is the acceptance by the government that agriculture is and should emit emissions as part of the essential work of food production.

The plan says agricultural emissions should still be reduced as far as possible, but the government is committed to doing so in a way that supports farm businesses and maintains food production at current levels.

Industry advances in vaccines use

NSA is proud of the progress sheep farmers have made towards government and industry ambition for preventative measures for specific health challenges within the livestock industry.

The total number of sheep vaccine doses sold increased by 12.6% between 2012 and 2021. Approximately 36.7m sheep vaccine doses were sold in 2021 indicating a huge uptake and improvement in the nations flock.

The lack of vaccine availability experienced over recent years is putting a large number of flocks at risk, simply due to the inability of the veterinary medicines industry to enable members to plan ahead in a well-informed manner. NSA is continuing to work hard to ensure government and manufacturers resolve supply chain issues as quickly as possible.



Prevention is better than a cure.



The critical role of sheep in the hills and uplands is still under discussion.

Uplands debates continue

As highlighted in the last edition of *Sheep Farmer*, discussions on sheep in the hills and the uplands have intensified due to disagreements over stocking levels on Dartmoor.

NSA has been heavily involved in discussions around this and wrote to all MPs in advance of a debate in the House of Commons in mid-April, pointing out the importance of sheep farming to landscape, environment, food production, and rural communities and economies – on Dartmoor and throughout the UK.

NSA also held a number of additional extraordinary meetings, bringing together NSA committees to discuss the more recent nuances within the upland sheep farming debate. NSA expects more work on this topic as a result of internal and external discussions.

Sheep skins disposal process remains difficult

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

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

More on page 28.



Problems continue for UK abattoirs.

Species reintroduction concerns

As new UK wide farming policies are incentivising habitat creation for wildlife diversity and improved high animal welfare standards in the UK, NSA considers it short sighted to be considering the reintroduction of severely damaging species, particularly the lynx.

The topic has been resurrected following a debate in Scottish Parliament so, having successfully argued against reintroductions in the past, NSA is looking again at the impact lynx could have on land management in Scotland - arguing it would upset the biodiversity of existing habitats and severely impact animal welfare and sheep farmer's livelihoods.

It is imperative there is a clear plan in place for the responsibility of the reintroduced species, especially when it comes to maintaining the UK sheep industry, the natural environment and consequences of increased footfall, including traffic litter, fencing, pathways, gates, damage to crops, fields and livestock attack incidents that could occur if a reintroduction was to take place. *More on page 15.*

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

NSA regional reports

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

It's full steam ahead for NSA North Sheep! The last few months have been extremely busy with planning for the region's summer event and we look forward to seeing you there.

There is also some activity planned for the autumn so members in the region are encouraged to keep an eye on emails and the NSA website to keep up to date with future engagement. *More on NSA North Sheep on page 8 and host farm feature on pages 20-21.*



NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

It was great to see so many members visit the NSA marquee at the recent Balmoral Show.

Once again, the varied stands within the marquee created a good atmosphere for what was an enjoyable show. Balmoral also provided a good opportunity to further promote NSA Sheep Northern Ireland, taking place at Tynan Abbey, County Armagh on Tuesday 4th July. *NSA Sheep Northern Ireland information on page 9 and host farm feature on pages 22-23.*

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

NSA members attending this year's Royal Highland Show are invited to visit the recently relocated NSA Scottish Region marquee.

Following a covid-driven absence from the show, NSA Scottish Region is very pleased to announce it will once again be situated directly beside the MacRobert Shearing Theatre at stand 1(B) on avenue M. Make sure you don't miss out on all the exciting things on offer, such as the stockjudging and sheep dressing competitions, alongside the fleece competition and a diverse range of sheep industry trade stands. Each trade stand has a distinct offering, providing great variety to those entering the NSA marquee. We hope to see you there.

NSA Scottish Region has also recently published the latest edition of its newsletter, which can be found at www.nscotland.org.uk.



NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region is looking forward to the regional heat of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition this summer.

Planned for July the competition will give young sheep farming enthusiasts the opportunity to show off their skills in a series of shepherding tasks for a chance to win generous prize money and opportunity to qualify for the national competition final next year at the NSA Sheep Event. Details of date and location will be shared soon but the likely location will be in Herefordshire.

Also this summer, the region will again support keen young handlers taking to the showing at the Royal Three Counties Show and wishes all the enthusiastic young shepherds the very best of luck.



NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

By the time you read this all our efforts will have paid off and NSA Welsh Sheep will have been a memorable and important industry event.

It would not happen without our hosts, sponsors, exhibitors, judges, regional committee members and all the volunteers whom we are indebted to. A huge thank you to all involved. A full report will be in the next edition of *Sheep Farmer* with a round-up of results in other NSA communications beforehand.

The region now looks forward to the Royal Welsh Show and would like to remind all members they are welcome to visit us on the stand on any of the four days, or at the reception on the Monday afternoon.

NSA Central Region

By Lizzy Wells, Manager

With lambing pressures beginning to ease and the weather starting to show signs of spring, the region's attention has turned to the organisation of summer events.

Preparation is underway for the regional heat of the NSA Next Generation competition, which will take place in summer. Plans for field days and farm walks are also progressing.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

NSA Sheep South West was a fantastic day out. Many thanks to all who made it on the day and to the committee members and volunteers who helped it run in what were horrendously wet conditions. It's a testament to all that the event managed to go ahead.

It is no small ask to host an event such as this and the efforts of Henry, Peter, Robert and the rest of the Derryman family aided its success. Also, a huge thank you to Sue Martyn, Event Organiser, and Dave Gregory, NSA South West Region committee member, who worked tirelessly over many months to ensure everything came together.

Once the dust has settled on May's event the region will look to hold a series of smaller farm visits and talks through the summer and autumn. *Full event report on page 6.*

NSA Eastern Region

By Josh Brock, Manager

The regional committee is busy behind the scenes organising its first farm walk of 2023, which will be in late June, as well as preparing for the NSA Eastern Region Next Generation event.

The region is really looking forward to the event, which includes the regional heat of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. It will be held on Saturday 12th August following the NSA AGM at Godolphin's Rutland Stud, Newmarket, Suffolk – full AGM details on page 2.

Following hot on its heels will be two NSA Eastern Region Ram Sales. The first will be at Rugby Livestock Market on Friday 25th August and the second at Melton Mowbray Market on Friday 15th September. We look forward to involving the committee as much as possible to ensure the delivery of two successful ram sales and other planned events.

NSA South East Region

Sarah Blake, Manager

Spring saw the region's programme of events get underway, kicked off by the NSA South East Region Next Generation Shepherds competition, in conjunction with the Southern Shears event held in East Sussex in mid-May.

This year's event acted as not only as a competition but also a learning experience for competitors. Next on the agenda is the South of England Show in June at the showground in Ardingly, West Sussex. NSA South East Region committee member and Ram Sales Chair James Goffin will run shearing demonstrations and there will be a display of fleeces from a range of breeds and various wool based products showing the diverse potential uses of wool. We look forward to welcoming you to the stand.

The Register of Sheep Advisers

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



Enthusiasm for NSA Sheep South West impervious to wet conditions



Fears created by relentless rain in the run-up to the event quickly diminished when the crowds descended on Peterhayes Farm, Yacombe, Devon, for the long awaited return of NSA Sheep South West.

Event host Peter Derryman and his family of four generations welcomed visitors to the event alongside NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. They both highlighted the role of farms in shaping areas of outstanding natural 'farmed' beauty, such as that viewed on the popular farm tour on the day. Mr Derryman also paid tribute to his late mother who was sadly missed from the event following her passing earlier in the year.



Mud under foot did nothing to dampen spirits at NSA Sheep South West.

Commitment

Hard work by the Derryman family and event organising committee in preparing for the event, the first in four years, was clearly appreciated by attendees. They were able to view more than 100 trade and breed society stands, watch demonstrations and join engaging discussion in the event's seminar area.

Topics on the agenda included guidance on the new Defra Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, information on precision grazing and a discussion on newer ways of breeding rams. A hot topic prompting many questions was an update on the new procedure for veterinary attestations to be introduced from December this year.

Unsurprisingly a highlight of the day for many visitors was the opportunity to view the Derryman

family's top class flocks of Hampshire, Romney and Suffolk sheep. Despite the sodden ground, the tractor and trailer rides were able to traverse the mud to give visitors the enjoyable farm tours.

Competition

The NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition saw eager young sheep farmers compete for the regional title and chance to qualify for the national final in 2024. Emerging as the victor was 18-year-old Will Land from Exmoor. He farms Hampshire Downs with his family and is a student at Cannington College, Bridgwater, Somerset.

Mr Stocker enjoyed being back at an NSA regional event. He commented: "Despite difficult

conditions spirits were clearly not dampened with a buoyant atmosphere and everyone able to enjoy the day. Thanks must go to all involved in the event's successful organisation and execution."

Bringing the busy day to a close was the popular sheepdog sale with a dog named Don, bred by Mr Edwards and sold to P. Ley for £2,000, emerging as the star of the day.

At the end of a busy day Mr Derryman said: "It has been fantastic. After all the worries concerning the conditions we are all so pleased with how the event went. The ground will quickly recover but I'm sure people will remember the good day they have had for a long time."

NSA Sheep South West

Wednesday 10th May 2023 at Peterhayes Farm, Yacombe, Devon, by kind permission of the Derryman family and sponsored by Shearwell Data.

Competition results

- **NSA Next Generation Shepherd.** Will Land, Exmoor (open). Tony Baldry, Kingsbridge (student).
- **Trade stands.** For Farmers (indoor), Harpers Feeds (outdoors) and Hampshire Downs (breed society).
- **Fleeces.** David Butt (overall champion, hill). Harry Pearce (medium and cross).

Details of all event sponsors and full competition results at www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk.



18-year-old Will Land won the Next Generation Shepherd competition.



The top sheepdog sold for £2,000.

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Lots to see and do at NSA North Sheep event in Northumberland



NSA North Sheep guarantees a tremendous show of livestock alongside a platform to discuss and debate the future of a sustainable sheep industry.

Hosted by J.E. Woodman & Son at Bradford House Farm, Ponteland, Northumberland, the event on Wednesday 7th June is in one of the UK's major sheep producing areas.

With support from across the industry, including Major Sponsor Hexham & Northern Marts, it will provide a showcase for networking and keeping up to date with the latest industry developments through demonstrations, seminars and hundreds of trade stands. For many attending the highlight will be the tour of the Woodman family's farm.

Farm tour

Willie Woodman, his wife and son farm 2,130 acres (860ha) across two holdings. Great Chesters is a 1,200-acre (485ha) hill farm in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall and Bradford House Farm is a 930-acre (375ha) traditional mid-Northumberland mixed enterprise. Bradford House Farm is home to a lowland flock of 250 Mule ewes and 200 Texel cross ewes, with arable enterprises growing wheat, barley, oilseed rape and beans.



Crowds will flock to NSA North Sheep.

Showcasing support for every breed from commercial to exotic and rare, more than 30 breed societies and associations will be represented, including mainline sponsor, the Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breeders Association.

Viv Lewis, Chair of NSA Northern Region and the NSA North Sheep 2023 organising committee, believes the timing and quality of this event makes it uniquely important for the UK sheep industry. She says: "There has never been a more crucial time for the sheep industry to find inspiration and encouragement. Our hosts and sponsors have enabled us to create a landmark event we are confident will offer both.

Event activities

"Through visiting the trade exhibitions and attending seminars, visitors will be brought up to speed with latest industry trends, technologies and information to help improve profitability and reduce the environmental and climate footprints of their businesses.

"Agriculture can be a lonely occupation and it is good for farmers to get together and compare notes. The success of the industry is very much in the hands of the next generation of entrepreneurial farmers, so I hope the day will give aspiring sheep farmers every possible encouragement to make a life in this wonderful industry."

Taking place during the day will be the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition with young entrants being tested on shepherding skills such as lamb selection, sheep shearing, stockjudging and flock management.

This year's demonstrations will also include a post mortem session with Professor Ben Strugnell, sheep shearing, crook making and lamb selection.

More at www.northsheep.org.uk, and meet the hosts on pages 20-21.



An outstanding line-up of speakers has been confirmed.

Seminars and presentations

- **Carbon: Understanding the journey to net.** Discuss the host farm's carbon audit, sponsored by Carbon Partner Virgin Money.
- **Resilience to change.** Gain an understanding of support schemes available under the UK Government's post-Brexit policy and how to maximise funding.
- **Looking beyond our shores.** Debate opportunities for exports and the pros and cons of global collaboration.
- **The sheep farming ladder.** Join a panel outlining current opportunities for young people.

Come and see:

- Farm Tours
- Seminars
- Demonstrations
- Breed Societies
- Trade Stands
- Competitions
- and much more!!
- 9am -5pm

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Email: heather@nationalsheep.org.uk

Picturesque on-farm setting for NSA Sheep Northern Ireland



It's 14 years since NSA Northern Ireland Region organised its first NSA Sheep Event and, once again, the event is stirring both excitement and some trepidation as the region steps away from its well-known venue of Ballymena Market to move on-farm for the first time in its history.

Following covid cancellations, this year is offering a chance for all involved in the Northern Ireland sheep sector to enjoy a fantastic day out and get up to date on the latest news and advancements from the sector, while meeting up with old friends.

NSA Northern Ireland Region is indebted to event host Kate Kingan and her partner Peter Mant Tynan, plus the farm owner, Kate's cousin James Kingan, for allowing the event to take place at the picturesque Tynan Estate, close to the Irish border, on Tuesday 4th July.

Event Organiser Edward Adamson says: "This is the time of year in Northern Ireland when schools have just started the summer break so it's a good chance for all the family to have a day away from the farm, a 'busman's holiday, if you will'"



The farm tour is not to be missed.

Host farm

Tynan Estate Farm extends to 850 acres (345ha) of which 550 acres (220ha) is permanent grassland, including 250 acres (100ha) of parkland and a site of special scientific interest. The remainder is woodlands, lakes and scrub. The farm runs 570 ewes and 100 replacements, mostly Suffolk cross and Romney, as well as 25 continental cross suckler cows and 50 Dexter cows.

For the event, the farm's recently erected lambing shed will house many sheep focussed trade stands, with cattle housing converted to the sheep breed area allowing visitors to view a wide range of sheep breeds. Outside stands will connect the two indoor facilities.

Seminars will closely follow the event theme of sustainable sheep farming, discussing environmental, health and welfare and financial issues affecting the Northern Ireland sheep farmer.

Young sheep farmers from across the region will be tested in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition, which is a great experience for those aged



Trade stands will be located in the lambing shed.

18-26. Previous entrants having thoroughly enjoying the contest, especially those who have qualified at the regional heat to representing Northern Ireland nationally and even internationally.

The farm tour will be a popular attraction, following a route through the Tynan Estate combining agriculture, incredible scenery and history on a fascinating short journey.

Wool

Ulster Wool will join the event with a fleece competition open to all. Even though wool prices may not currently enthruse many shepherds, representatives will encourage sheep owners to present their wool in the best possible condition to achieve the best return.

Before returning home after a great day out, visitors are reminded the ever-popular sheepdog sale will be taking place, no doubt attracting numerous spectators as well as those shepherds needing to find their next 'best friend'. Don't miss out on what will be an enjoyable day in beautiful County Armagh.

Meet the farm hosts on pages 22-23.



Come and see the different sheep breeds.

By kind permission of Kate Kingan

Attractions include:

- Sheep Breed Societies
- Trade Stands
- Young Shepherd Competition
- Seminars
- Sheep Dog Sale

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Tynan Estate, Cortynan Rd, Tynan, Armagh, BT60 4QZ.

www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sheep-ni
Contact Regional Manager, Edward Adamson for further information.
Email: edward.adamson1@gmail.com
Phone: 07711071290

NSA advises members to think about vet attestations before December 2023.

What is a vet attestation and how does it affect selling my sheep?

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

As of December 2023, the way export health certificates are issued for products leaving the country is changing, requiring evidence the animals used to make food, drink and agricultural products are from farms receiving regular vet health visits.

Because such a large percentage of lamb produced in the UK is exported, anyone selling finished lambs and/or cull ewes at an auction market or to an abattoir needs to assume they are affected by this change.

What is a veterinary attestation?

It is evidence provided by a vet and used by the official veterinarian when signing the export health certificates (EHC) that accompany products being exported. Attestations are required for the purpose of obtaining an EHC for products of animal origin including food for human consumption and animal by-products, and live animals not intended for human consumption, to enter EU Member States and third countries.

The attestation provides evidence the farm was free from a number of stated notifiable diseases and had a good standard of disease control and biosecurity at the time of the visit. A standard paper form is available for vets to use, which may become an online option in the future.

What is an export health certificate?

It is an official document to confirm products being exported (including products from your farm sold to a third party to export) meet the health requirements of the destination country. You may not be exporting products yourself, but if your animals or products from your animals

are later exported, an export health certificate will be required.

Can I continue doing a self-declaration?

As of December 2023 the self-declaration will no longer be permitted. The system will be a veterinarian declaration only.

When is an EHC needed?

The exporter must apply for an EHC if exporting or moving animal products or live animals from Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) to or through Northern Ireland, the EU or non-EU countries. Farms supplying the exporter must provide the vet attestation as evidence of a reasonable level of disease control.

What if I'm a farm assurance scheme member?

Membership of the main national assurance schemes qualify as being compliant without the need for a standalone vet attestation. Qualifying schemes are:

- Red Tractor (Assured Food Standards).
- QMS Cattle & Sheep Assurance.
- Farm Assured Welsh Livestock (Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers).

I'm not farm assured, do I need a specific vet visit?

No. These attestations are for the purpose of disease prevention and the detection of biosecurity risks. An attestation does not need to be the sole purpose of the visit and can be combined with other visits covering routine work, providing all species present at the premises are considered. For example, routine TB testing, flock health planning or government supported vet visits such as Pathway, could be used to complete an attestation.

How often do I have to have a visit?

Attestations should be done at least once during a 12-month period.

Do I need to keep records?

Signed attestations should be retained by the farm business as a source of evidence if required by the official veterinarians certifying relevant export health certificates.

Do I need a vet attestation per holding?

Business with more than one CPH number will need to have all holdings assessed for the relevant species to enable the vet to issue the declaration.

Do I need to do anything if I don't export any animals or animal products?

You need a veterinary attestation if you sell direct to a meat processor, sell finished or cull animals through an auction market, sell directly to a finisher or export directly to the EU or Northern Ireland. If you are confident that no parts of your animals are being sold into export markets you will not need an attestation.

I'm not sure if I need one, what do I do?

Speak to your vet. They have a wealth of knowledge and will be able to advise you and your specific farming set up.

When do I need to start thinking taking action?

It is strongly advised not to leave this until December. Ask your vet between now and then to provide the attestation when they are out on farm conducting any routine visit.

At the time of writing, it has not been agreed how the attestation will follow stock through markets or collection centres, but it is important farms have the attestation in advance of December or when they first start selling after this date.

This situation is developing. Keep in contact with your vet, gov.uk and NSA to ensure you're up to date.

Buy and sell the best at an NSA Ram Sale



WHY PICK AN NSA RAM SALE?

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

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

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

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

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

NSA Ram Sales 2023

NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale

Monday 7th August – Royal Welsh Showground

NSA South West Ram Sale

Wednesday 16th August – Exeter Livestock Centre

NSA Eastern Region Rugby Ram 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 for contact details of our Ram Sales Organisers.**



Reaching environmental and productivity targets through flock health

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

With changes across the country to the way farm support payments are being distributed, a higher focus is being placed on emissions, the environment, health and welfare, and productivity.

Animal health plays a key role in all these areas, as well as being critical for the reputation of livestock farming both domestically and globally. The way the UK sheep industry works means it is hard to claim complete freedom from disease, but the assurance methods in place provide varying levels of significant risk reduction that can only help achieve a higher health status flock.

NSA activity

Now more than ever, knowing improved flock health has positive links to productivity and environmental footprints, NSA encourages members to consider the relevance of these accreditation schemes and health monitoring programmes to their own situations.

In the meantime, NSA will continue to educate policymakers and influencers about the practical realities of managing flock health, encourage proactivity between farmers, vets and other advisers, and work hard to maintain its strong relationships with industry groups. These include important organisations such as SCOPS, Moredun, SRUC, the Ruminant Health & Welfare Group, Sheep Antibiotic Guardian Group, Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance and Sheep Vet Society. We are all in this together for both individual flock health and the status of the national flock.

The largest national sheep health scheme – the Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme (PSGHS) provided by SRUC – has and continues to provide a framework for establishing the status of flocks and provides guidance for reduction, occurrence, eradication and certification of freedom from certain diseases.

National scheme

SRUC works with vets, breed societies and farmers to provide a national programme of proactive testing and management to control maedi visna (MV), enzootic abortion of ewes and Johne's disease in sheep. SRUC also runs a scrapie monitoring scheme for export and scrapie genotyping for selective breeding.



There are a range of accreditation schemes and monitoring programmes to consider.

Although best known for accreditation of pedigree flocks, SRUC offers a commercial MV screening programme and other services to assess presence of disease.

While PSGHS is the nationally recognised scheme there is a vast variation of schemes, self-certification and testing that can be done through vets to ensure the health and productivity of flocks across the country continue to improve.

It's becoming increasingly popular for individual farmers and farmer groups to sell stock with their own independent breeder-to-breeder health assurances, working with vets and independent accredited laboratories, and doing their own independent laboratory testing.

An example of an independent flock health scheme is Biobest's HiHealth Flockcare, which provides services including:

- Parasitology, to assess worm and fluke burdens and efficacy of treatment with anthelmintics/flukicides.
- Biochemistry profiles to address specific issues such as trace element status, pre-lambing nutritional status and diagnosis of metabolic disease in the peri-parturient period and a range of tests to make up tailored profiles to assess other problems such as thin ewes or stiff lambs.
- Serological/PCR testing for important infectious diseases including border disease, MV, liver fluke and Johne's.

Although many will be familiar with the schemes and approaches covering the iceberg diseases, there is much more at stake when it comes to overall flock health. Parasitic gastroenteritis caused by worms, anthelmintic resistance, sheep scab, footrot and contagious ovine digital dermatitis are all production limiting diseases that can be screened for, with some level of assurance given even if freedom from disease cannot be claimed.

Inefficiency

While the presentation of some production limiting diseases may be mild, they often cause inefficiency. The extent of the problem within a flock can be underestimated because visibly diseased sheep are only indicative of what might be going on under the surface.

Increasingly, buyers of breeding replacements and breed societies are demanding stock sold with certified accredited health status and it is a requirement for export to some countries. NSA has noted an increase in the number of sales, especially for rams, that require stock to be tested and free from certain diseases.

The risk of buying in disease is a major reason behind many farmers running closed flocks and it's not difficult to see a future where some form of health assurance will be required from the stratified side of our industry and those trading in breeding stock.

Continuing improvement as the Livestock Information Service enters second year

Although the introduction of EID in sheep was a painful era, there is little doubt it has helped prepare our industry for a heightened level of traceability.

This is important at an animal level for protection against diseases such as foot-and-mouth, and at a product level for food traceability and securing trade deals in new export markets.

For a growing number of sheep farmers, EID is also delivering significant gains in on-farm management recording and decision making.

Databases

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "EID in sheep was fundamental to the introduction of movements databases for sheep, given the way we move and trade animals, and all our UK nations have their own databases. However, as our industry operates on a UK basis in relation to sheep movements and trade, it's essential all four movements databases connect and amalgamate information at one point.

"Such a change in traceability, the tools we use and the culture of using them, is a big step for any industry and we should expect it takes time. The launch in England of the new Livestock Information Service (LIS) for sheep in March 2022 followed several years of the Animal Reporting & Movement Service (ARAMS), making significant improvements and simplifications. LIS also co-ordinates UK movements and is in a better position to report and analyse data on a UK level."

Livestock Information Ltd, jointly owned by AHDB and Defra, delivers LIS to develop and

deliver traceability services for sheep, goat, deer, cattle and pigs.

Keepers need a current CPH and associated, registered email address to use the services for sheep, deer and goats, which is just over a year old. Cattle and bovine traceability is the next focus.

Nikki Davies of Livestock Information comments: "The livestock tracing service will be a key component in animal disease management and control and will allow the UK Government to meet its statutory and international obligations. We aim for it to provide enriched and more accurate movement data to support suspected and actual disease outbreaks.

"It will provide opportunities for more information to be made available to the agriculture industry, promoting greater efficiency and productivity. A wider economic benefit will facilitate access to export markets.

"While it's understood not everyone has good, reliable access to mobile services and that broadband can be patchy, time and effort can be saved once you set up your account."

Looking ahead

Mr Stocker, who sat on a sounding board for the introduction of LIS, continues: "Like any new service, LIS is bound to have its teething problems, but it's an important step in improving traceability and supporting trade development. While the use of paper movement documents must still accompany stock being moved, the LIS prepares us for a time when paper is no longer required – a policy change being considered, and even now it can be used to print off completed movement documents – reducing the illegibility of biro."



More people using LIS will allow more real-time movement reporting.

LIS advantages

Livestock Information says the online system has many benefits.

- Ability to report movements from a mobile, tablet or desktop computer.
- Access anytime and anyplace.
- No need to call for paper forms and wait for delivery.
- No costs for stamps, envelopes or trips to the post office.
- Reporting done online in realtime, offering confidence it's complete.
- Ability to print out online movement documents.
- Access to a support team via phone (08445 730137) or email (support@livestockinformation.org.uk).
- Confidence the service is evolving based on feedback and user experience.



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- Ask your vet or adviser for support or visit the SCOPS website.

*interval varies according to the product used.

Visit www.scops.org.uk/treatmentcheck



Welsh rural crime activity, animal health projects and future farming schemes

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



I attended the launch of the new Wales Wildlife & Rural Crime Strategy 2023-2025, which was an interesting day in late April, covering a huge range of topics.

Updates on bird crime, Operation Heritage Cymru, Operation Seabird Cymru, application of forensic science in wildlife crime, and mental health and suicide prevention were some of the areas discussed, as well as each police division in Wales providing a rural crime officer activity update.

Stock+ project

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair Kate Hovers spoke at the summary HCC Stoc+ project conference in late April, an event that highlighted

this now complete project has provided sheep and beef health planning to 360 Welsh farms working with 43 vet practices. She was the veterinary advisor for the project and was able to discuss project learnings from her perspective and promote her positivity about the engagement and benefits for those participating fully.

Government

Gavin Watkins from the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer spoke about the lessons learned from a Welsh Government perspective and posed questions, actively seeking feedback for the animal health section of the future Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS).

There are still meetings happening with the proposed new SFS in Wales and we understand there will be a further consultation in the autumn.

Finally, I am pleased to see the Gwaredu Scab project get underway and NSA Welsh Sheep used to launch the initiative. This project will give industry the chance to tackle an ever-increasing problem.



Lack of leadership stalls critical support for Northern Ireland sheep farmers

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



By the time this edition reaches your doorsteps local elections will be over and the posters of various political party candidates looking down and smiling at us all will be obsolete.

Unfortunately, it all seems removed from the stalemate we have at Stormont where there is no functioning executive to make decisions. The

sheep sector launched a vision for the future of the sector in January and, at the time of writing, we have no decisionmaker in place to comment or reply to our suggestions.

Desire

We look to the Republic of Ireland in envy at schemes in place to support its sheep farmers. For example, a €16/t subsidy on lime and a sheep welfare scheme payment worth €12/ewe helping

prop up its sheep sector.

Northern Irish Farmers recently put in their applications for this year's Basic Payment Scheme, so are beginning to think about what will be in place for next year.

NSA Northern Ireland Region is continuing to work proactively to develop and build on the outlined policies for agriculture to ensure any future executive can be on the front foot and well briefed.

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Lynx reintroductions causes frustration and anger for Scottish farmers

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



Reintroduction of the lynx was debated by Scottish Parliament in late May after a motion by the SNP's Kenneth Gibson received cross-party support to engage this discussion.

The motion highlighted the moral and ecological case for the species' return, and how lynx reintroduction could make Scotland's natural world 'richer and stronger' via a managed reintroduction, following appropriate assessments.

Biodiversity

NSA Scottish Region supports the diverse habitat and biodiversity across farmland but believes protecting the habitats that exist, the species at risk right now and the people managing them should be the priorities for government. NSA members across Britain and notably Scotland have been at the sharp end of species reintroductions, from poor consultation processes,

illegal releases, a lack of management strategies and no mitigation, exit or recognition of the impacts to farming businesses and livelihoods.



Reintroduction of the lynx is creating concern in Scotland.

NSA Scottish Region is concerned by contradictions arising from government policy and has highlighted the short-sightedness of incentivising habitat creation and improved animal welfare while at the same time encouraging

species reintroductions that could damage the current biodiversity of habitats and severely impact animal welfare and farming livelihoods.

Agriculture bill

Looking forward, detail on how the Agriculture Bill and support package will embed food production, climate adaptation and resilience in Scotland's agriculture sector remains undefined and absent from the information regarding the proposed support package framework for farmers.

NSA is continuing to stress the importance of livestock production for environmental, economic and animal health benefits, and is trying to ensure it is not lost at the expense of implementing arbitrary livestock reduction targets.

Scotland does have a legal requirement to meet climate change and emissions targets, but many are forgetting there is also a requirement to implement a 'just transition' and that sustainable food production is a vital component.

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Relocation to Scottish Borders opens doors for NSA Ambassador



Since taking part in the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme, Sion Morgan has continued to progress in his farming career, taking on a role with more responsibility while building on his own farming interests.

By his own admission, the years have flown by since Sion made the move to farm in the Scottish Borders seven years ago.

After doing an electrical apprenticeship while living and working on the family's beef and sheep farm in the Brecon Beacons, Powys, Sion was keen to gain experience of farming systems elsewhere.

He initially spent time in New Zealand completing a shearing season before a year-long stint working at Mount Linton Station, one of New Zealand's largest sheep stations. He moved to Scotland in 2016.

After three years working with large numbers of sheep on a New Zealand style system near Galashiels, Scottish Borders, Sion has since taken on a role managing several thousand Scottish Blackface sheep on a large upland estate.

Experience

"The opportunity to gain more large-scale farm management experience was a main draw of taking on the new job on the estate," says Sion.

"As well as working on the farm, I also have wider responsibilities including staff management, general day-to-day organisation and decision making around things like reseeding and cropping," he explains.

"I work closely with my vet and FEC samples are carried out regularly to make drenching

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 Sion Morgan, who joined the programme in 2018.

decisions. I also use farm management software for farm record keeping, which I would not be without now. It allows me to keep everything in one place from livestock movement and medicine use to sheep records and fertiliser and spraying records. I can add in data as I go along and it makes information much easier to keep track of."

Sion has also been able to establish an 80-ewe South Country Cheviot flock, run under the Mainstay prefix, alongside wife Hannah.

Sion says: "My interest in the breed stems from its similarities to the Llandovery Whiteface breed which my father and grandfather farm and for which I would occasionally come to Scotland to buy rams to bring home.

"The South Country Cheviot is a solid, compact, hardy ewe well suited to the ground we are farming here in Scotland, which rises to some 1,700ft (520m) at its peak. Our goal is to breed and rear rams to sell at the society sale at Lockerbie, Dumfries, and potentially further afield in the future.



Sion and wife Hannah at their farm in the Scottish Borders.

"The versatility of the South Country Cheviot breed is also appealing. It has strong maternal traits and could be suited to a range of sheep systems, able to produce hardy lambs that will go on and breed, or those that can be finished and easily marketed if crossed with a terminal sire."

Sheepdogs

Working dogs are another passion of Sion's, with his team of Border Collies and New Zealand Huntaways essential to his day job. He is also a keen sheepdog triallist and competes regularly with his collies, earning him numerous open trial placings in recent years, as well as a place in the Scottish national team in 2021.

"A huge part of my day job could not be done without a team of good working dogs," says Sion. "The farm and hills here are perfect for working the dogs; it is a beautiful place to work and a dream job for me."

Looking to the future, the overarching ambition for Sion and Hannah is to build up or create an enterprise with the next generation in mind.



The NSA Next Generation Ambassador intake in 2018.



Sion's other passion is competing in sheepdog trials.

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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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Shaping the future of animal health

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NSA stalwart shows opportunities come to those who strive for the best

By John Geldard, NSA Vice President

Never become complacent, be adaptable and continually look to your target market to adapt and meet demand.

These small pieces of advice have been instrumental to my years of success at Lower Foulshaw and in the wider agricultural sector. When I was starting out this guidance would have helped me unreservedly and I would urge any young or new farmer to follow this advice too.

Having started my farming career close to 50 years ago, after securing a tenancy with my wife Rachel, we set about building a business that would support our family. With this in mind we moved to develop a mixed farming business on a greenfield site near Levens, Kendal, Cumbria.

Our passion was to develop a business that could survive without support and play a credible role in our local economy.

Foundations

We built our farming enterprise from scratch and now our family-owned business features beef, sheep and a layer enterprise, managed by my sons Richard and Charles, together with Plumgarths Farm Shop, managed by my daughter Victoria Hodgson and granddaughter Anna, who has just completed a butchery course.

The Plumgarth enterprise now encompasses 12 businesses and employs more than 50 members of staff. I would never have imagined as a younger man we would achieve so much. I'm very proud and believe it shows what you can achieve if you think big.

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 third contributor to this series is John Geldard, NSA Vice President and Northern sheep farmer, who has been active involved in industry organisations and initiatives throughout his career.



John and his family have built a diverse farming and retail enterprise.

I was born into farming. It is in my blood and it gave me determination to succeed in this industry. My career has been punctuated with success, challenges and opportunities and I have tried my best to make the most of these.

I would tell my younger self that commitment and enthusiasm are key to success. Opportunities are given to those who are willing to strive. There are barrels full of knowledge and tips you learn as you get older; but the difference between age and youth is that age has the knowledge and youth has the energy. As a young farmer you often discover that, unfortunately, you cannot have both!

When I started my career the world was quite a different place and consumers were happy to spend a larger proportion of their income on their

food. This decline has been at the expense of the farming industry, where margins have been squeezed in operating a cheap food policy. But the low inflation economy is now coming to an end and the world's food surpluses have evaporated.

This will put a different dimension on the need and importance of the agricultural industry and highlight the importance of the farmer and food produced. I think young sheep farmers can be optimistic about the opportunities this will create.

Integration

During my career I have been a great believer in the importance of being part of a network and so have been a loyal supporter of NSA and other farming organisations. This led me to take an active interest in the policies affecting farmers and their future. The easiest thing is to sit back and do nothing, but if we are proactive we can help make sure the industry can achieve goals. I am pleased I did this and encourage more young people to do the same.

My involvement in NSA and farming organisations led to me being awarded the Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture at the British Farming Awards in 2019. I was exceptionally honoured to receive the accolade but, without the support of family, I would not have been in a position to get out and participate in the activities that allowed me to make a difference. Not taking that support for granted is something I recommend to anyone starting out.

Agriculture has a bright future and the next generation has a lot to look forward to.



David Heath, the Farming Minister in 2012, is one of many MPs and policymakers John has invited to his farm.



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1. Clements *et al* (2014). *Veterinary Record* 10.1136/vr.102161

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Texel cross ewes are one of the Woodmans' chosen breeds.

NSA North Sheep hosted by farm with eye on sustainable future

The Woodman family is delighted to be hosting NSA North Sheep 2023 and is looking forward to welcoming visitors to Bradford House Farm in Ponteland this June.

As an integral part of this sheep sector showcase, Willie Woodman, who farms with wife Christine, mother Kathleen and son Martin under the umbrella of the long-established J.E. Woodman & Son farm business name, will guide visitors on a tour of the traditional mixed farm in Northumberland.

The family farm is 2,130 acres (860ha) across two bases 30 miles apart. There is 1,200 acres (485ha) at Great Chesters in the shadow of Hadrian's Wall, and 930 acres (375ha) at Bradford

House, the NSA North Sheep host farm near Belsay. The family has run Great Chesters as a livestock farm since Willie's father Ted took the tenancy in 1969. They bought the farm in 1993 and purchased Bradford Farm in 2002 as a base to grow wheat, barley, oilseed rape and beans, and in recent years have added more acres to the Bradford House holding.

Heritage

Willie, who is also a director of Hexham & Northern Marts, is proud of his heritage and the way he and the farming community has moved to keep abreast of changing demands and government policies.

He says: "We are traditional Northumberland farmers, but I hope we can showcase not only our own approach here at Bradford, but also



Willie Woodman.

the progressive approach farmers are taking in the surrounding area. This is a very big honour for us to be asked to host NSA North Sheep. It's an opportunity to share our lifetime's work and a traditional livestock enterprise with other dedicated farmers."

The Woodmans have 270 suckler cows, mainly Limousin crosses with a few Blue crosses, and 40-50 bulling heifers. They sell their suckler calves as stores at 18-22 months old at Hexham Auction Mart.

Sheep enterprise

The two farms carry 1,150-head of sheep made up of 700 Blackfaces and 450 Mule and Texel crosses, all homebred and predominantly grazed, both at Great Chester and Bradford House.

"Our sheep flock is in the main self-sufficient," says Willie. "We breed all replacements and only buy in Blackface and Texel tups from Hexham Mart. We occasionally purchase a Bluefaced Leicester tup to put to the small number of Bluefaced Leicester ewes which we have, specifically to breed Bluefaced Leicester tups to use on some of our Blackface ewes."

Where possible, all lambing takes place indoors with the sheep being housed approximately a month before. Finished lambs are sold through Hexham Mart. The Woodmans sell lambs from the end of July until the end of the following March, at 46-50kg.

"Visitors to our farm will not see show sheep or cattle," explains Willie. "We focus on breeding and producing quality commercial animals, with the aim of getting a good sized carcass that will be in demand in the main UK markets."

Bradford House, sitting at almost 500ft (152m) above sea level, is a typical Northumberland mixed farm, half permanent pasture and half temporary grassland and arable. Soil testing is undertaken regularly and variable rate fertiliser is applied as and when needed.

The family grows all its own silage and hay. Wholecrop beans are crimped for silage and fed to cattle, along with homegrown barley, wheat and oilseed rape, with the remainder sold through the Tyne Grains cooperative.

Lambs graze at Great Chesters until the end of October and are then brought down onto the lower land at Bradford House to feed on stubble turnips throughout the winter.

Teamwork

In addition to the family, the two farms provide employment for a shepherd and two stockmen. Together they work across both holdings to meet the needs of the annual farming calendar and challenges of the Northumberland weather.

"We have a fantastic team and couldn't manage without them," says Willie. "Their support makes our farming life so much easier."

"Farming at two locations inevitably creates additional challenges and costs. We have

machinery costs to deal with at both farms, which is more expensive than one independent unit."

But it is coping with increasing red tape, the government's post-Brexit policies and the huge rise in costs that present the biggest problems for the Woodmans' business, and their fellow farmers.



Mule ewe with Texel cross lambs at foot.

"The lack of direction from the government at the moment makes planning for the future almost impossible. It is going to be very useful indeed to have these issues discussed at NSA North Sheep. But rising costs are not in anyone's control, and that's a major problem in running a commercial farming enterprise and trying to maximise your return," Willie comments.

The two farms are managed under a system aiming to make the business as self-sufficient as possible. Along with forage, the Woodmans produce all their own straw and most of the feed their stock needs. They see this as being of huge benefit in minimising input costs – apart from the extraordinary extra cost of fertiliser.

In every way it can, the family is also taking advantage of existing and new support schemes. The land at Great Chesters on Hadrian's Wall is

in higher-level stewardship and the whole farm has recently undertaken a carbon audit, results of which will be shared at NSA North Sheep.

"We're already very conscious of our carbon usage, and if the audit identifies opportunities for us to reduce our carbon footprint, as I am sure it will, it will help save costs and improve our financial efficiency. We are already looking at planting trees in some of the less productive corners of our land and will be interested to see what the audit says about our livestock numbers."

Vital forum

An NSA member of many years, Willie sees the NSA North Sheep event as a vital forum for sheep farmers at a critically important time for the industry. He concludes: "Organisations like NSA give grassroots farmers like myself a voice, and a platform to share problems and solutions."

"I hope when visitors come to our farm, they'll get a good insight into our costs and margins, and how we have tried to improve efficiency. I hope very much the whole event will stimulate debate about how we can make sheep farming fit for whatever the future brings, for the benefit of the next generation and beyond."

NSA North Sheep is on Wednesday 7th June. More on page 8.

Farm facts

- Two farms totalling 2,130 acres (860 acres).
- 1,150 Blackface, Mule and Texel cross ewes.
- Focus on production of prime lambs sold through Hexham Auction mart.
- 270 suckler cows and 40-50 bulling heifers.
- Looking to a greener future following a recent carbon audit.

Bradford House Farm will be home to this year's NSA North Sheep.



“

We focus on breeding and producing quality commercial animals, with the aim of getting a good sized carcass that will be in demand in the main UK markets.

”

Willie Woodman



The flock has been built gradually to allow more genetic control.

Decade of farming change on show at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland host farm

Tynan Abbey Farm has experienced a significant transformation over the past 10 years with soil fertility, grassland management and farm infrastructure all changing drastically.

Part of the 850-acre (345ha) Tynan Abbey Estate in County Armagh, close to the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, it is an excellent setting to host NSA Sheep Northern Ireland in July.

The estate farm has been run by Kate Kingan and Peter Mant Tynan since 2014. While the farm has been in Kate's family for centuries, it was rented out for decades prior to her return and, in the latter years, had fallen into poor shape.

Kate comments: "The changes on the estate, which includes the farm's 550 acres (220ha) of grassland, have been impressive given the farm infrastructure was severely limited with regards

to fencing and animal housing, alongside low grassland productivity.

"The focus for us at first was to gradually build stock numbers in line with improving farm infrastructure. We now have a farm plan to help further progression to a high performing grass-based system, delivering a farming system that is sustainable physically, financially and environmentally."

In recent years the farm participated in the Northern Ireland Sheep Programme and, as part of this, developed a three and five-year farm plan, reviewing the farm's objectives and setting key performance targets to identify areas for change. This included soil fertility, grassland management, breeding and genetics, health planning and performance recording, all of which will be discussed at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland.

Building fertility

High rainfall and lack of attention to soil fertility and replenishing nutrients meant the farm had a low level of production potential when Kate and Peter took over. Kate explains: "We applied approximately 500t of lime in the first few years of being here with another 200t applied in 2019/20 and 50t in 2021. Soil pH has now lifted from an average of pH 5.9 to 6.3 and the focus now is addressing any remaining deficits and moving to maintenance applications.

"There is still work to be done on raising phosphorus and potassium indexes and this will be an ongoing project for a number of years."

Improvements have again been positive and this is attributed to the recycling of large volumes of slurry with 3,400m³ imported annually in the last couple of seasons. Strategic use has also been made of farmyard manure. At the same time purchased fertiliser reduced from more than 36t in 2019 to zero in 2022.



Hosts Kate Kingan and Peter Mant Tynan.

"We believe in the saying 'it takes grass to grow grass', comments Kate. "As fencing was sparse or in poor condition when we returned to the farm, we needed to make improvements in order for us to work on better grassland. Work was undertaken to stock-proof all external boundaries and an ongoing plan is in place to improve internal fencing and increase the level of rotational grazing taking place."

Improving grassland

A reseeding programme has underpinned a big jump in sward productivity and has been central in increasing the farm's stocking rate, grass growth in early spring and late autumn (the shoulders of the year), animal performance and finishing higher numbers on farm. It has also supported ensiling better-quality silage and hay and reducing the need for supplementary feed.

Grass measuring and budgeting is now being used to track performance, identify underperforming swards and make more informed management decisions.

Kate comments: "In the region of 250 acres (100ha) of grassland is designated as an area of special scientific interest with swards more than

60 years old. It is important to us to continue to protect these areas where chemical fertiliser, reseeding and other interventions are prohibited but it's been encouraging to see its performance has still been improved by greater attention to grassland management."

It is not uncommon for up to 120 acres (48ha) of the farm to be flooded for much of the winter. This means the on-paper stocking rate may look low but, when these environmental habitats are taken into account, in reality stocking rates are much higher.

Livestock

Flock numbers have grown gradually over the last decade and now stand at an average of 570 ewes, 100 ewe lamb replacements, 25 continental cross suckler cows and a 50 head Dexter herd with all progeny brought through to beef.

After several years of purchasing ewes and ewe lambs to build numbers, it is only recently that Kate and Peter have reached their desired position of having more control on genetics and breeding sufficient replacements from within.

"This is a policy which we will continue. We are also exploring what genetics best suit this farm's resources," says Kate.

The couple have had a positive experience with Romneys in recent years and numbers are currently more than 200 and rising. Kate explains: "We have moved from several batches lambing from February onwards to now having the main batch of Suffolk cross ewes lambing indoors from the end of March onwards and Romneys outdoors in April. This has greatly cut workload on the farm and the systems continue to improve with regards to labour input, mortality, animal performance and potential output."

Kate and Peter are conscious when growing livestock numbers that purchasing in animals from different sources brings the risk of introducing disease. For this reason, the farm is moving to a closed flock policy. There is also a robust health programme in place and an extensive quarantine protocol for any purchased sheep, which in the future will be primarily rams. There have been niggling issues in the past with lameness and watery mouth in lambs. "These problems have been resolved with a focus on preventative measures. We've had a new footbath installed and have started using the footrot vaccine, both of which are improving previous issues," says Kate.

A renewed focus on nutrition, colostrum management and hygiene has reduced problems with e.coli scour and watery mouth, aided by an extensive vaccination protocol including anti-abortion vaccines and those preventing clostridial disease. Good use is made of faecal egg counts to determine the need to carry out worm treatments and test the efficacy of products used.

Future planning

The farm plan is providing direction for the farm but, to get the most from this, Kate and Peter are aware it needs to be regularly reviewed asking hard questions on whether or not it is still the best fit for the farm.

"To help us track performance we are making good use of electronic identification in the sheep flock and benchmarking is allowing us to compare performance year on year, seeing the contrast to a wider pool of similar systems," says Kate.

Kate and Peter were planning on continuing to grow stocking rates but have taken a decision in line with an escalation in input costs to pause

any future expansion for now and ensure they are getting the most from their current stock while trying to insulate their system from rising costs.

Kate comments: "This has been a sensible decision with input costs remaining high."

Kate and Peter are looking forward to welcoming visitors to NSA Sheep Northern Ireland, confident it will prove an excellent opportunity for visitors to see how much has been achieved in the last decade.

This article is reproduced by kind permission of the Irish Farmers Journal. NSA Sheep Northern Ireland is on Tuesday 4th July. More information on page 9.



Good health planning and management maintains high health status.

Farm facts

- Part of the Tynan Abbey Estate, Co Armagh.
- 550 acres (222ha) of grassland plus woodland.
- 570 ewes and 100 ewe lamb replacements, mainly Suffolk cross and Romney.
- 25 continental cross suckler cows and 50 Dexter cows.
- Moving towards a closed flock to improve flock health.
- Focus on soil health and grassland management.



[The plan is] a high performing grass-based system, delivering a farming system that is sustainable physically, financially and environmentally.

Kate Kingan

A mixture of indoor and outdoor lambing is in place for the different breeds.

Local community strives to raise sepsis awareness in farming community

By Katie James, NSA

Farmers are well known for their resilience and can-do attitude, often demonstrating a reluctance to slow down and take time off or seek medical attention when unwell.

Minor injuries and illness are rarely considered a reason to worry – but UK Sepsis Trust suggests the farming community is more susceptible than it realises to a serious condition that can often start with something as small as a cut on the finger.

Sepsis (also known as blood poisoning) is the immune system's overreaction to an infection or injury. If not treated immediately, it can result in organ failure and death. Sadly, five people die with sepsis every hour in the UK, yet with early diagnosis it can be treated with antibiotics.

Risk factors

Due to the nature of farmwork, sometimes in infectious environments and working in rural, often isolated settings, the risk of sepsis can be heightened, but it is still rarely thought of as a threat.

The NSA community was sadly made more aware of sepsis when Hannah Brown, a 26-year-old sheep farmer from NSA Northern Region tragically lost her life to this disease in 2021. Hannah, originally from Leyburn, North Yorkshire, lived in Appleby, Cumbria, with fiancé Ben and daughter Millie. She was well known to many NSA members as a regular face in showrings across the UK and as a committed supporter of NSA North Sheep.

Hannah's parents Val and Martin Brown comment: "Sepsis was something we'd heard of and we knew it could kill but you never imagine it will happen to you or someone you know. You think you're invincible."

Following Hannah's death, her family and friends threw themselves into extraordinary fundraising activities raising money for UK

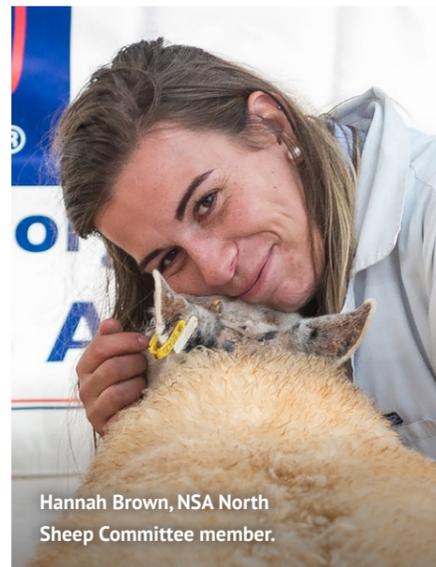
Sepsis Trust. Together they have produced a video to raise awareness of sepsis within the farming community. The video shares information on the condition and instructs viewers to 'Just ask: could it be sepsis?'

The video was welcomed by Dorne Richardson, the mother of Hannah's fiancé Ben, who has been the driving force behind the awareness campaign, raising more than £126,000 for the charity.

Campaign

She says: "The message of the serious risk sepsis can present is definitely spreading. Just in our local village two ladies have been affected and, if it were not for us sharing Hannah's story, they would not have been so aware and would not have gone to the hospital. We know this campaign is already saving lives, but we just want to save more."

Brian Davies of UK Sepsis Trust shares some advice: "The fact is farmers are at increased risk of becoming infected, so any cuts should be cleaned thoroughly, disinfected and covered before returning to work. Sepsis can also be caused by



Hannah Brown, NSA North Sheep Committee member.

injuries as a result from trauma or by illness. If you or a loved one displays any symptoms, seek medical attention, urgently."

Find more information and the video featuring Hannah's story at www.sepsistrust.org.

CHILDREN

A child may have sepsis if he or she:

- Is breathing very fast
- Has a 'fit' or convulsion
- Looks mottled, bluish, or pale
- Has a rash that does not fade when you press it
- Is very lethargic or difficult to wake
- Feels abnormally cold to touch

ADULTS

An adult may have sepsis if they show any of these signs:

- Slurred speech or confusion
- Extreme shivering or muscle pain
- Passing no urine (in a day)
- Severe breathlessness
- It feels like you're going to die
- Skin mottled or discoloured

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT SEPSIS:

Call 111 or contact your GP if you're worried about an infection.
Call 999 or visit A&E if someone has one of the sepsis symptoms.

JUST ASK "COULD IT BE SEPSIS?"

Sheep Farmer magazine
promote your services to the UK sheep sector from just £30 for NSA members.
Speak to Helen Roberts.
See page 2 for contact details.



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Maximise the value of wool: a guide to presenting your fleeces for grading

By James Bickerton, British Wool



Although the type of wool your sheep produce cannot be altered, there are still steps you can take on farm at shearing time to obtain the highest value for your fleeces.

If you have suitable buildings, it is worthwhile keeping sheep under cover the night before shearing, as sheep should never be shorn when the fleece is wet. Always shear on a clean wooden surface so fleeces do not become contaminated – or use a canvas or tarpaulin sheet if you must shear outside.

When shearing, avoid double cuts or tearing of the fleece and remove all claggs and dagging.

Keep your coloured breeds and hogs separate from the ewes and wethers. If you have just a few coloured fleeces or hogs, simply bag them in a separate, clean corn bag or bin liner then place this in the wool sack with the other fleeces. There is no need to label it, as the grader will identify them in the depot.



Rolling

Roll fleeces on a clean surface and pack them into British Wool sheets. Do not over-pack the wool sheet. Start with a single fleece width across the bottom of the sheet, then stack the fleeces on top of each other until the sheet is full. Don't be tempted to pack extra fleeces into the sheet, as it is easier to handle, store, transport and unpack 11 correctly filled sheets than ten overfilled sheets.

Label each sheet inside and out with your registration number, name and address. Fasten the sheets with the string provided. Do not use binder, bale or polypropylene twine, as the fibres can mix with the wool and lower its value.

If you are going to store your wool sheets for a period, keep them in a clean, dry place. If possible, ensure they are stored off the floor in a dry building.

Condition

Ensuring your wool is delivered to British Wool in good condition helps us maximise your clip value. Remember there is no onward haulage charge incurred for wool delivered into a British Wool collection centre or depot.

Something to consider all year round is non-licensed marker sprays. Although marking sheep is unavoidable, excessive marking can devalue your fleece and using non-licensed markers can result in the fleece being rejected by the processor.

More information in the 'Your Wool' section at www.britishwool.org.uk.

Roll and pack fleeces properly to increase the return value.

British Wool's supply chain role recognised by Defra

Findings of a Defra review into British Wool operations has been welcomed by British Wool and the wider sheep sector.

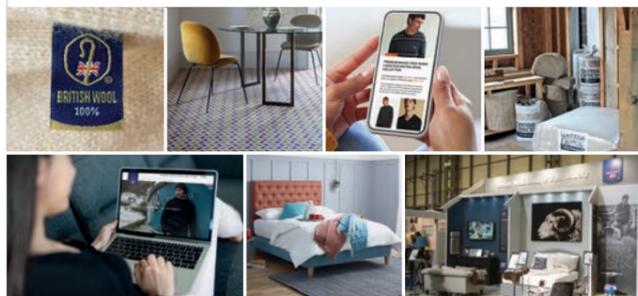
The review recognises British Wool's role in the supply chain from collecting and marketing wool, delivering shearing courses and working with universities to develop new and innovative uses for British fleeces.

Andrew Hogley, British Wool Chief Executive, comments: "Defra's review recognises the value we add for our members and our contribution to the wider wool industry in the UK. By collectively marketing the UK wool clip on behalf of our members, British Wool works to maximise the value of wool for UK farmers."

NSA was among the organisations also welcoming the review. Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "NSA views the future success of British Wool as being important if our wool producing sector is to succeed financially at an industry level."

Creating new demand

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Together we're growing something special.



Are you well covered?

Fluctuating trade and increasing incidences of sheep worrying are just two reasons why it's worth reviewing policies and avoid any insurance shortfalls.

Georgie Spencer of Acres Insurance Brokers says: "There are several key areas to consider when safeguarding a sheep farming operation against potential losses or incidences that may affect the flock. Ensuring livestock and farm policies are up to date and fit for purpose for your enterprise will provide reassurance you are covered even for the worst-case scenario."

First priority

Ms Spencer says regularly reviewing policies should be the first priority given the fluid nature of the market and fluctuating values and trade prices.

"We all know there are peaks and troughs throughout the season, meaning stock values and flock sizes fluctuate," she says.

"It is necessary to ensure your policy is kept up to date, particularly with the value of breeding sheep and prime lamb prices. Review sums and make sure they match current market values of your flock."

Mrs Spencer says it is also important to understand standard livestock farm policies only cover the basics, and it is therefore advisable to consider optional extensions for more extreme eventualities.

"With rural crime often appearing to have an undue impact on the sheep farming sector, simple and low-cost add-ons to your policy can cover for incidences such as theft or mysterious disappearance. Other areas to consider include fatal injury to stock while in transit or while straying, as it is unlikely a standard policy would cover for any losses and/or replacement costs."

Sheep worrying

Since lockdown restrictions eased, the draw to the countryside grew and, allied to increased rural housing and the growing holiday-let farm industry, closer encounters with livestock and the dog-owning public have increased.

While dog attacks and worrying are nothing new, police are now reporting a sharp rise in incidents across the country, and in turn an escalation in claims.

"Cover for sheep worrying is available as an extension to a standard livestock policy," says Ms Spencer. "While this may not offer protection for the emotional costs, income losses can at least be recovered."

She also recommends taking account of individual circumstances and periods where staffing levels will increase.

"Liability cover is probably the most important insurance," says Ms Spencer. "Make sure you get good advice on indemnity levels, remembering employers liability should cover for injury or illness of all persons performing work for the business, including cover for self-employed persons, casual labour and non-paid labour, as well as persons under contract of employment."

"It may just be a neighbour helping out for a few days, but if they are not included you leave yourself exposed," she adds.

A final note of guidance is to be careful where sheep are turned out and if possible, avoid footpaths, not only to minimise risk of worrying but also to reduce potential incidences involving ewes protecting vulnerable lambs.

"Speaking to an insurance adviser familiar with your business will help identify potential risks, and ensure you have proportionate cover in place," concludes Ms Spencer.



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Skin processing continues to burden lamb processors.

BUSINESS



Reduced sheep skin demand creates additional cost pressure for processors

By Nan Jones, BMPA



Lamb processors in the UK are facing unexpected cost pressures due to a dramatic drop in demand for sheep skins.

Rather than skins being sold, as they have been previously, forming part of a processor's income, they are being sent for further processing at a cost of up to £1.50 per skin. Some processors are reporting additional costs of more than £20,000 per week, which they cannot continue to keep absorbing.

To ensure processing businesses achieve a positive margin, it is vital to achieve carcass balance where the cost to the business is less than its income. The current situation where processors are paying for the sheep skins to be taken away rather than getting paid for them is not sustainable for an industry working on 1% margins.

This will lead to processors having to recover costs elsewhere, either by increasing the cost of products, adding to food inflation, or reducing the farmgate price, putting more pressure on farmers.

Disposal

Beyond the issues caused by shrinking demand for skins, there are other logistical issues in the UK. There are currently no other viable disposal methods due to cost or environmental challenges. Also, given that most processors only have storage capacity for one or two weeks' worth of production, any difficulty moving on skins will

quickly lead to backlogs and the inability to take in more sheep for processing.

The drop in demand is a global problem caused by factors such as the introduction of synthetic fabrics, high chemical and transportation costs, the covid-19 pandemic, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.



Other countries are less affected due to storage capacity and processing capabilities.

China, the world's largest importer of sheep skins, accounting for 55% of total imports and a value of \$207m in 2020, has also been hit by the drop in demand for sheep skins. In December 2022, the value of imports to China dramatically reduced to \$10.5m, which can be attributed to factors such as China's steep trade drop due to its zero-covid policy and the reduction in global and domestic demand. Tanners are also facing high electricity and chemical costs.

Countries such as Australia and New Zealand are managing the impact much better as they have

larger storage facilities for skins and more processing options available. New Zealand, for example, has invested in alternative processing methods such as 'green fleshing', which utilises whey or permeate solution for depilation, thus eliminating the necessity of sulphide for depilation and preventing skin from microbial degrading for up to a week at room temperature. This process is environmentally favourable and has helped New Zealand manage the impact of the drop in demand for sheep skins.

Processing

The processing of sheep skins involves treating the skin with toxic chemicals for durability, which can have a variety of environmental consequences. While China in the past has paid little attention to environmental consequences, it is now required to take more consideration. Due to lower processing cost and environmental standards, China has managed to corner the sheep skin processing market, predominantly controlled by one company, leaving them with the ability to dictate the market price.

Given this confluence of market forces, it is unlikely the demand for sheep skins will return to previous levels, which will add to the increased cost pressures the lamb processing sector is facing. This is a brewing problem affecting the whole supply chain and risks adding to food inflation while changing the demand and pricing of sheep for farmers.

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Addition of genomics giving an extra kick to Welsh hill breeding project

By Dr Heather McCalman, HCC



The use of genomic breeding values is well established in the dairy sector and developing quickly in the beef industry, however this is not the case for the UK sheep sector.

An exciting new development as part of HCC Hill Ram Scheme has explored the feasibility of developing genomic breeding values in the hill sheep sector by taking advantage of the unique and large DNA database built up during the project.

Livestock breeding involves the identification and selection for mating of those animals with the best genetics for a specific breeding objective. Traditionally the breeding values produced for breeders with performance recorded flocks have been predictions of an animal's genetic merit based on their performance and that of their relatives compared to other sheep in the flock.

A recent feasibility study shows, by accounting for genetic linkage between flocks, this prediction can go further and report genetic merit relative to the wider recorded population, offering breeders increased accuracy and confidence in genetics.

Breeding values

Genomic Estimated Breeding Values (GEBVs) are used in the same way as EBVs and contribute to the breeding index that has been developed for hill sheep.

We know each animal gets half of its genetic material from each parent and when a lamb is born it is assumed its breeding potential sits halfway between its parents. In reality some lambs will get more of the better genes from each parent and some will get worse ones. One way to enhance breeding evaluations would be to move away from making predictions about the genes thought to be inherited, to using genomic information that tells us the actual genes it possesses.

As part of the Hill Ram Scheme, tissues samples have been collected from lambs, ewes and rams to extract DNA sequences (genotypes) to determine the parentage of lambs. While these genotypes allow verification of parentage and tell breeders about individual genes that may have a large impact on performance, they can also be used to inform breeding evaluations about the

thousands of tiny bits of genetic variation on the DNA strand that combine and contribute to the overall genetic merit of the animal.

For breeding animals, the inclusion of their genotype and performance data into a genetic evaluation isn't the end of the story. As with conventional evaluations, as an animal accumulates progeny records the genomic component of its breeding values will gradually diminish.



A large DNA database has been created during the project.

As accuracy values rise, estimates of genetic merit will get closer to the true breeding value of the individual enabling breeding decisions to be made with greater confidence.

Genomic information can provide a wealth of intelligence and insight but it is particularly useful for traits that take a long time to be assessed, such as ewe longevity, traits that are only expressed in females and traits that are

very expensive to record, such as meat quality.

This type of work is the first of its kind and puts Welsh sheep farmers and breeders at the forefront of livestock breeding and genetic information.

The Hill Ram Scheme has been a five-year initiative to empower hill farmers and breeders with genetic information through the use of the latest DNA recording technology. This has enabled performance recording to proceed without disrupting their hill management systems by allowing detection of parentage by matching the DNA of the ram, the ewe and lambs.

Wider goals

The project's wider fundamental aim has been to encourage the use of data and genetics for hill farmers and breeders to make informed decisions about their flocks, with the aim to create a critical mass of performance recorded hill flocks in Wales, resulting in an improved trickle-down effect through Welsh sheep systems.

The scheme now boasts a group of 50 engaged and enthusiastic farmers who have used the latest DNA technology to record within their flocks. These farmers are now planning to use the genomic data as well. We look forward to seeing how this legacy continues in the Welsh sheep sector.

This work is part of the wider Red Meat Development Programme and funded through the Welsh Government and EU Rural Development Programme.

Avoid losses at weaning time by keeping lamb immunity strong

By Cici Corbett, SRUC



Weaning can be a stressful point in the year for lambs, but a bit of pre-planning can help avoid the health issues that sometime arise around this period.

Ideally lambs should be introduced to novel feeds or swards when with the ewes, rather than abruptly after weaning time.

Similarly, it is best to give wormers (if required) and vaccines before weaning, to minimise stress and get the most out of the products used.

Gathering lambs for worming and vaccination can coincide nicely with an opportunity to weigh lambs and assess ewe body condition, allowing you to plan which lambs you will wean in the coming weeks.

Anthelmintics

Consider using a group 4 (AD-orange) anthelmintic for a pre-weaning worming dose. This is a newer product so there is less widespread resistance. Using it mid-season can clear out resistant worms, as recommended by the SCOPS principles. It is a more expensive product, but resistant worms could be far more costly to the farm in terms of reduced weight gain and losses over time.

Vaccines are another key area for consideration in the lead up to weaning, as passive immunity

SRUC advice on vaccines to consider at weaning.

Vaccine	Diseases covered	Pros/Cons
Heptavac-P Plus	Pulpy kidney, struck, braxy, tetanus, blackleg, some types of clostridial metritis, lamb dysentery. Includes pasteurellosis.	Includes components relevant to young lambs. Good for ewe lamb and hogg replacements.
Ovovac-P Plus	Pulpy kidney, braxy, tetanus and blackleg. Includes pasteurellosis.	No cover against lamb dysentery. Fine for fattening or store lambs.
Ovipast Plus	Pasteurellosis only.	No clostridial cover.
Lambivac	Pulpy kidney, struck, tetanus, lamb dysentery.	No pasteurellosis cover.
Covexin 8	Pulpy kidney, lamb dysentery, struck, blackleg, braxy, tetanus, some types of clostridial metritis.	No pasteurellosis cover.
Covexin 10	Pulpy kidney, lamb dysentery, struck, blackleg, braxy, tetanus, all types of clostridial metritis, yellow lamb disease.	No pasteurellosis cover.
Bravoxin 10	Pulpy kidney, lamb dysentery, struck, blackleg, braxy, tetanus, all types of clostridial metritis, yellow lamb disease.	No pasteurellosis cover.

achieved by lambs through colostrum generally only lasts a few weeks. Vaccines can provide two to 12 weeks' further protection, depending on the vaccine used and its component.

Giving lambs their own clostridial/pasteurella vaccine is particularly important when maternal immunity wanes – and stress at weaning time can cause a pasteurellosis outbreak, leading to

sudden deaths and/or pneumonia.

All clostridial vaccines initially require two injections several weeks apart as the primary course. Although it is recommended to stick with the same vaccine product, if this is not possible (as seen over the past few seasons with supply and demand issues) then toxoid vaccines are still likely to have acceptable crossover action if they contain the same components. However, a single injection of a vaccine containing a component not seen by the animal before will not produce a lasting immunity.

Vaccine choice

Using two vaccines at once is not generally recommended by the manufacturers, but may be needed on some units where cover against pasteurellosis and multiple clostridial components is needed, for example using Ovipast Plus and Lambivac together. Speak to your vet if in any doubt.

Due to supply issues again this year, clostridial vaccines normally used may have been unavailable. If you've struggled to buy your usual vaccine choice this year, there are other clostridial vaccines on the market. Your vet will be able to advise what specific product would work best on your farm, depending on disease history and risk factors (see table). Remember, prevention is always better than a cure.

Health planning pre-weaning is essential to prevent fatalities.



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Understanding sheep roundworm egg count results at a glance using FEC Check

By Lynsey Melville and Eilidh Geddes, Moredun 

Parasitologists at Moredun have developed FEC Check, a farmer-facing, free, online tool that interprets faecal egg count (FEC) results for roundworms in sheep.

Although a FEC itself is simple, translating the results into management decisions can be more difficult, particularly for those who are new to testing. Studies have shown support and advice from test providers is variable, meaning some results are received without context or interpretation. And while generic information is available free-of-charge, extracting the information applicable to individual situations can be challenging and time consuming.

Interpretation

The FEC Check app overcomes this by taking FEC results and visualising them on a graph with a colour gradient that represents the clinical impact. Green indicates low-level infection, not requiring treatment, and red indicates treatment is likely needed.

The gradient is based on advice from SCOPS and links to reliable resources about sustainable roundworm control and testing have also been included in the app, including how to collect good quality faecal samples and different uses of FECs.

FEC Check has three modes – monitoring, efficacy testing and post-treatment drench

check. The first provides a traffic light visual of regular FECs taken to target worming treatments to optimal timepoints or individual animals requiring treatment.

The efficacy testing mode visualises the reduction in roundworm eggs after treatment, comparing pre and post-treatment results to provide the percentage reduction and information on what this means (see diagram).

Treatment failure can be due to administration and testing issues rather than anthelmintic resistance so a reliability checklist has been incorporated into the app allowing confidence in the results shown (see panel).

The post-treatment drench check mode can be used where a post-treatment test has been conducted but no pre-treatment test. This will allow you to visualise the results and what they mean clinically but will not describe how well the treatment worked. This can be a useful indication of whether parasite eggs are remaining after treatment in large numbers.

Resistance

Testing can highlight the early stages of anthelmintic resistance, at which point actions can be taken to slow its development. Examples include reducing the use of wormers by implementing targeted treatments, grazing management and ensuring every dose is given accurately.

Where resistance is detected, FECs can be used to identify at which times of the year those

products can still be useful. Within the app there is a decision support tool, designed by SCOPS, for those with multiple anthelmintic resistance on their farm. This provides tailored management suggestions to work through with your vet or animal health advisor.

Find the app at app.moredun.org.uk/fec and online resources at www.scops.org.uk.

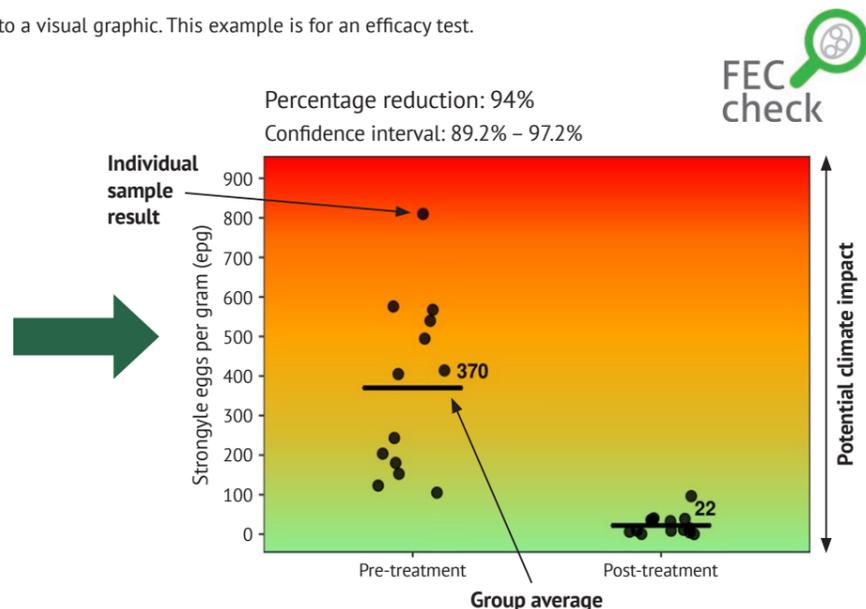
Reliability checklist

If the efficacy test mode of the app suggests a treatment failure, the reliability checklist highlights issues to investigate before assuming anthelmintic resistance is present.

- Good quality faecal samples tested.
- Pre-treatment FEC totals over 200 eggs per gram.
- Correct dosing technique.
- Post-treatment samples collected only from treated sheep.
- No other treatments given between sampling points, such as an injection for sheep scab or a long-acting wormer less than five weeks prior to first sampling.
- Different grazing groups of sheep did not mix between sampling points.

FEC Check converts a results table of numbers into a visual graphic. This example is for an efficacy test.

Sample	Pre-treatment	Post-treatment
1	261	0
2	207	0
3	162	9
4	207	3
5	72	0
6	369	46
7	189	0
8	99	42
9	909	0
10	405	5
11	117	9
12	105	0
13	720	9
14	54	1
15	48	7
Average	262	9



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Farmer-vet engagement encouraged to increase mastitis understanding

By Alberto Luque Castro, ECSRHM



In commercial flocks the treatment cost and increased mortality associated with acute mastitis are often the only costs directly perceived by the farmer, but all mastitis cases have a major economic and production impact.

One of the main production impacts is the reduction in the quantity and quality of milk. This is a direct loss for sheep dairy farmers, as milk is the main source of income, but in meat or mixed flocks, the decreased milk production leads to poor lamb growth rates and increased lamb deaths from starvation.

Studies have proven milk yield of ewes with subclinical mastitis are significantly lower in comparison with uninfected ewes. Therefore, the daily liveweight gain of the lambs reared by mastitic sheep is reduced.

Udder defects such as lumps or abscesses (associated with clinical mastitis) are also related with poor lamb performance. For example, ewes with udder defects weaned 20-43% less total kilograms of lamb compared with ewes with normal udders.

Incidence

Even though some farms report 20-30% of culled ewes have udder defects at weaning, it is likely the percentage of ewes culled due to mastitis in the UK is underestimated and, consequently, disease incidence.

As a result of decreased longevity and higher mortality of ewes with mastitis, the ewe replacement of the flock is likely to be increased resulting in further financial losses at farm level.

It has been reported the annual incidence of clinical mastitis in small ruminants (including dairy ewes and goats) is generally lower than 5%, but it could reach much higher levels in problematic flocks.

NSA members may remember a recent mastitis survey from Edinburgh University in the Weekly Email Update. Preliminary results of the 301 participants has estimated the average incidence of clinical mastitis in the UK and Republic of Ireland is 4.4%. This study also suggests higher incidence could be associated with small flock size, lowland flocks, pedigree and smallholder flocks and indoor lambing. Further analysis will see if these associations are significant and if in fact these types of flocks are truly more affected by clinical mastitis.

Subclinical mastitis

Due to the labour and financial costs of testing for subclinical mastitis, the incidence of this type of mastitis is unknown.

It is difficult to evaluate the role of subclinical mastitis in developing clinical mastitis or ewe and lamb performance without knowing its incidence. Further research is needed to understand if subclinical mastitis is potentially a concerning disease in meat producing sheep flocks.

Factors such as age, number of lambs, nutrition or udder conformation have been proved to increase the risk of developing mastitis but the epidemiology of this disease is still not fully understood. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to implement effective preventive and control measures to reduce the occurrence of mastitis and its negative effects on farm.

Therefore, it is not only essential to seek veterinary advice for treating mastitis but also when having issues with mastitis at flock level.

A full investigation, which may include sample collection, animal examination and/or husbandry and management assessment of each specific case, is necessary to understand more. This farmer-vet cooperation will help to unravel the knowledge gaps about mastitis.



Mastitis infection

- Inflammation of the mammary tissue, generally caused by bacterial infection, most commonly *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Mannheimia haemolytica*.
- **Clinical mastitis** is change in tissue consistency (varying from hard, fibrotic to soft; oedematous and abscesses may be palpable), gland appearance (swollen or shrunken), milk appearance (yellow to brownish) and milk texture (pus-like or watery).
- Presence of fibrotic tissue in the udder generally relates to a **chronic clinical mastitis**.
- A swollen udder with obvious milk changes is associated with **acute clinical mastitis**.
- **Subclinical mastitis** is the absence of any visibly detectable changes in the milk or the udder so diagnosis requires further tests such as milk bacteriology or somatic cell counts.

Consequences

- Increased veterinary and treatment cost.
- Decreased milk production.
- Poor lamb growth rates.
- Increased lamb deaths from starvation.
- Increased ewe mortality.
- Decreased ewe longevity.
- Increased replacement rate.

Risk factors associated with mastitis include age, udder conformation and number of lambs.



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Could willow trees be the answer to cobalt deficiency in your flock?

By Ben Walker, Bishopton Veterinary Group



When studying at Nottingham University, I was involved in a study suggesting willow leaves, high in cobalt, could be used to boost the vitamin B12 status of weaned lambs and have a role in cobalt deficient flocks.

Cobalt is certainly important for sheep – but is it a step too far to think a tree can help? And how does tree fodder compare to other supplementation?

Cobalt is an essential trace element in sheep for the synthesis of vitamin B12 in the rumen. Vitamin B12 is required, particularly in fast-growing lambs, to support growth and energy metabolism. Deficiency causes reduced daily liveweight gain and non-specific immunosuppression. Your vet can measure vitamin B12 concentrations in your flock through blood sampling.

Existing methods of supplementing cobalt are variable. Targeted drenches and boluses can successfully treat cobalt deficiencies but there are some disadvantages, including cost and time taken to administer.

Research shows cobalt drenches must be administered on a weekly basis to show good efficacy. In theory boluses provide a steadier supply of cobalt for rumen microorganisms to produce vitamin B12, but it is not currently a requirement for manufacturers to prove efficacy to market these products.

Research trial

The university trial, in partnership with the Woodland Trust, found lambs fed willow leaves (as 10% of DMI) had significantly improved vitamin B12 status over a two-week period. In comparison, the control group and a group that were given a cobalt drench showed no improvement. The trial wasn't large enough to compare growth rates but it would reason lambs with adequate vitamin B12 would grow quicker.

There are other benefits to using willow. For example, it is a well-known source of aspirin and might have some mild anthelmintic properties due to its tannins. There are harmful interactions between cobalt deficiency and worm burdens. High parasite loads can damage the gut lining meaning less vitamin B12 can be absorbed. Reduced vitamin B12 status can, in turn, weaken the immune system and can leave sheep unable to fend off parasites. This is a vicious cycle resulting in poor performing lambs. The high concentrations of cobalt and tannins in willow could help to break this cycle.

Additionally, trees can provide shelter and shade to livestock, and can provide fodder during drought periods. Funding is available for on-farm tree planting and a number of organisations are able to offer advice.

Read the full research paper at doi.org/10.1016/j.livsci.2022.105047.



Willow is palatable and can be used as a supplementary source of dietary cobalt.

Tips for feeding willow

- Willow is fast-growing and can be ready for grazing two to three years after planting.
- Supplement pasture grazing with willow fodder when pasture cobalt concentrations dip and weaned lamb requirements are highest (August and September).
- Incorporate willow into hedgerows, marshy ground, unproductive land and/or areas mob-grazed by weaned lambs.
- Consider coppicing or even ensiling willow to maximise the amount of cobalt-rich fodder harvested from each tree.



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Fewer births and increasing lambing problems this year are a direct result of the drought conditions of 2022 that, for many flocks, greatly reduced the amount of forage available to feed ewes at critical times.

Bryn Hughes of Wynnstay says learning from this for the future will pay dividends, referring to estimates from the Republic of Ireland of an £80/hour return on time spent on forage management.

"There are not many areas on the farm where we can see this type of return," he says. "And remember, ewes in good body condition are always easier to manage than those in poor condition."

Mr Hughes says there are many tools available to grow more grass, starting with the significant advances made in soil testing in recent years.

"Soil samples are becoming much more sophisticated and can give you an interesting view on the condition of the soil," he says. "Around 80% of soils sent in for analysis are below target levels. Even though many soils sent for analysis are potentially from fields identified as poor performers, that's still high.

Mr Hughes says farming the top four inches of soil on your farm is a good investment.

"Always start with addressing soil improvement with the pH by adding lime," he says. "Liming is crucial and encourages more productive plants to grow and improves the uptake and efficiency of fertilizer significantly."

New leys

Well managed pasture mixes will grow nearly double what an old sward dominated by weed species will. Mr Hughes promotes new leys to feed nearly twice as many sheep or do a better job on the existing sheep numbers.

"Establishing new seeds can be a challenge. Some farmers have a lot of success with direct drilling but attention to detail here is critical," he

highlights, suggesting failures with direct drilling are often due to:

- No soil testing and poor nutrient status.
- Decaying matt of vegetation suppressing seed germination.
- Poor seed to soil contact.
- Poor growing conditions.
- Competition from established, existing plants.

"All these reasons can be addressed with soil testing, timing, light harrowing prior to drilling and a light rolling post, and use of glyphosate to remove existing plants," says Mr Hughes.

Many sheep farmers will use brassicas as a pioneer crop, establishing a root crop first and then possibly 18 months afterwards replanting a ley. Brassicas can provide a lot of feed at critical

Grazing sward height targets (source AHDB)

Stock	Grass height entry	Grass height exit
Ewes and lambs	8–10 cm	4–6 cm
Weaned lambs	10–12 cm	6–8 cm
Topping ewes	8–10 cm	4–6 cm

times of the year but need attention when planting. Be sure to:

- Soil test and feed the crop.
- Ensure good soil to seed contact.
- Reduce weed competition early on.
- Monitor for pest and disease.
- Plan fertiliser applications as part of your nutrient plan.

Mr Hughes also acknowledges the high level of interest in multispecies leys and the benefits they offer in many situations.

"My advice is to keep the mix relatively simple, say seven species, and manage them carefully to perform well. If you manage multispecies leys in the same way as old grassland they will disappoint," he says, recommending sticking to set pre and post-grazing sward heights (see table).

Management

Looking at grassland management more widely, Mr Hughes expresses relief at the recent drop in fertiliser prices. "Fertiliser grows grass and has an excellent return on investment on good well managed grassland – 5:1 in early season. So use fertiliser as a management tool to grow grass," he says.

Another option for growing more grass is considering lambs are fast growing and have high



Grazing multispecies swards can offer a number of benefits.

feed conversion rates early in life, so it can be useful to reduce stocking rates early.

"Every action should be taken to maximise the growth of lambs early in life," suggests Mr Hughes. "Growth rates of more than 400g/day are achievable with the the correct management inputs and grass growth but everything has to be right to achieve this target."

If high grass rates cannot be achieved at grass alone, perhaps because weather patterns affect grass growth, Mr Hughes says creep feeding may be an option.

"Trials on creep-fed lambs have shown moderate intakes of 30kg-40kg/head to finish allows lambs to leave the farm three weeks earlier, freeing up ground and reducing labour requirements."

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Grazing management is recommended, especially with red clover mixes, to avoid impacting fertility.

Multispecies swards can live up to the hype – if done properly

The buzz around multispecies swards is justifiable – if you ensure you get the most from them and avoid underestimating the value of plant diversity, says Paul Morgan of Germinal.

“When farmers approach me about multispecies, I find them curious, but cautious,” he says. “Some are sceptical about animal performance while some think it will be too much work for not enough gain. But I’m also seeing a lot of interest from younger farmers who see multispecies as an effective way to reduce costs, and they are right – increasing plant diversity in grass leys is a fantastic way to farm productively and sustainably.”

Mr Morgan suggests the standard sheep grazing mix should always include herbs such as chicory and plantain, a perennial ryegrass and clovers.

“I recommend a blend of different clovers, as each type and variety brings its own benefit to the sward,” he adds.

White clover has a creeping stem (stolon) structure, which increases grazing tolerance and winter hardiness. “Experiment with multiple varieties and leaf sizes, as a good grazing mix will include this diversity,” says Mr Morgan, adding that newer varieties of clover will also bring extra benefits like drought tolerant root structures or improved nitrogen fixing.

Seek advice

To choose the best multispecies mixture for your farm, Mr Morgan recommends asking your local merchant for advice.

“They should be familiar with the local soil profile and weather, what is working well for farmers near you, and they should understand your farm’s requirements,” encourages Mr Morgan.

He is very honest about the effort required to change systems to embrace multispecies swards, but says this should be seen as an investment in time, enabling you to spend less money in the future.

“A clear benefit of multispecies is the nitrogen-fixing of some plants within the mix enabling a reduction in spend on bought-in nitrogen,” he says. “This makes further artificial nitrogen unnecessary and potentially detrimental if it causes grasses to outcompete other species.”

Multispecies is also a cost-effective way to add condition to your flock, with research suggesting red clover can increase liveweight gain and shorten finishing times for lambs by nine days – although it should be avoided for females immediately pre and post-tupping as it can affect fertility.

Reducing inputs

“With shorter finishing times, and better-quality forage, you can reduce the amount of bought-in feed, giving economic and environmental wins,” Mr Morgan adds.

“But careful grazing management is needed to effectively use multispecies. They are best suited to rotational grazing, so you need to invest time to set up the infrastructure to move mobs of animals more often.

“Rotation length should allow multispecies swards to remain in the leafy, vegetative state. If the sward is left too long, plants will bolt affecting forage quality. If it’s grazed too tightly, the crown of the clovers and chicory will be permanently damaged. An ideal system is to graze residuals down, move the stock off while the sward recovers, then bring the stock back on.

“You need to stay on top of the grazing cycle – but it’s worth it in terms of cost reduction and performance gains.”

Mr Morgan says multispecies swards are being increasingly recognised in various farm support

schemes because they provide habitat for birds and insects, including pollinators, and benefit soil health as the long taproots from red clover and chicory improve soil fertility. They are also recognised for improving nutrient uptake and water filtration, contributing to less groundwater, while the blend of root structures helps with carbon capture in the soil. The more roots you have in the top 15cm of soil, the more carbon will be captured.

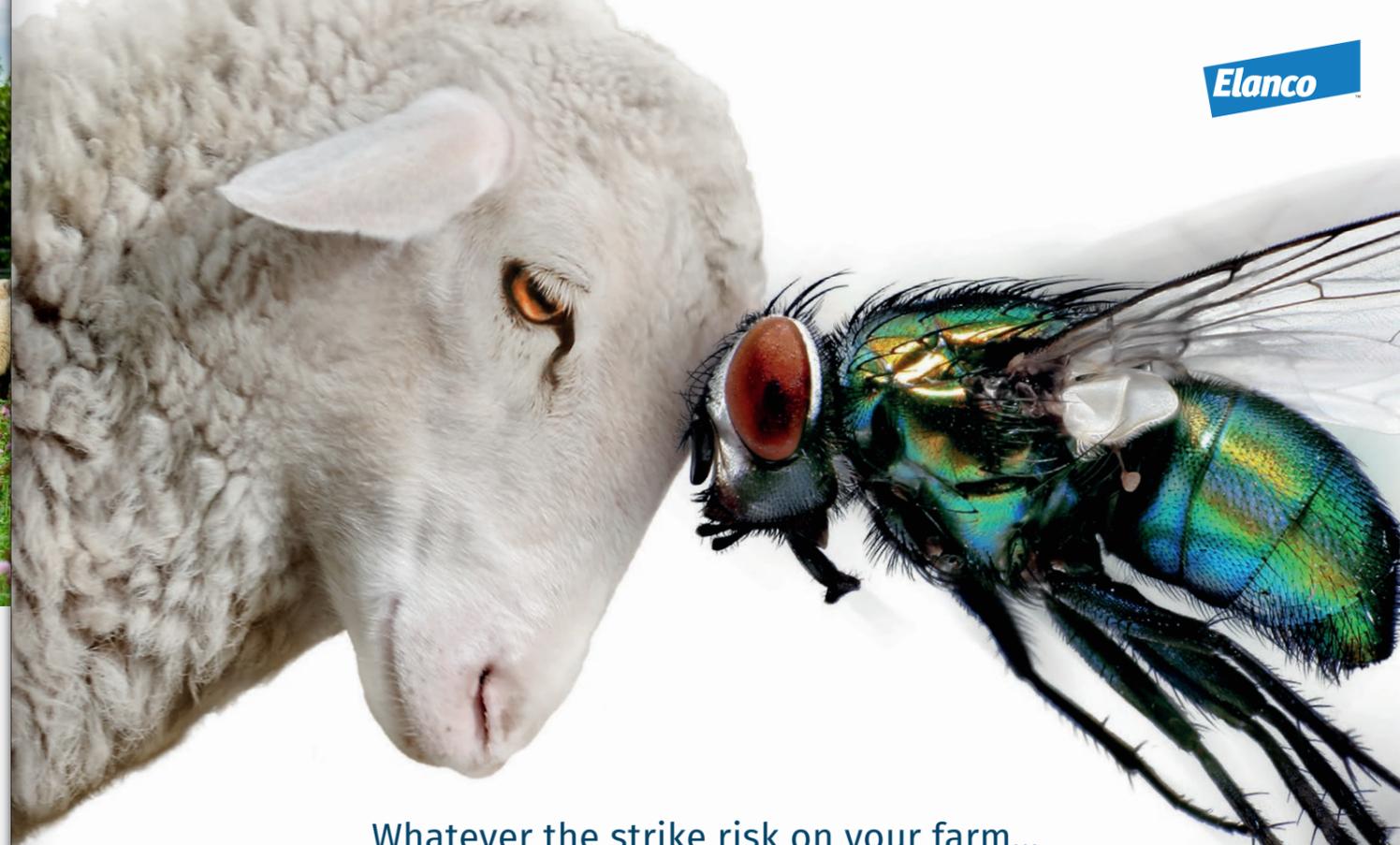
Mr Morgan concludes “It’s a win-win for the environment and farming. When these soil and biodiversity benefits are combined with reduced fertiliser and improved performance, it is easy to see why there is a justified hype building around multispecies.”



Multispecies swards can improve animal health and reduce input costs.

Multispecies sward management tips

- Save money by not applying nitrogen fertiliser.
- Avoid grazing females on mixes containing red clover six weeks pre- and post-tupping.
- Include multiple white clover varieties, with different leaf sizes.
- Explore drought tolerant or deeper rooting varieties.
- Employ careful grazing management to utilise sward effectively.



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Climate change and bracken growth tied to rise in ticks and tick-borne diseases

By Nicola Wilton, contributor

The sheep tick is a threat of growing concern to sheep farming, with new research revealing a serious and increasing danger to livestock health and farm economics.

Traditionally, it has been assumed there are distinct peaks of tick activity in spring and autumn, but the lines are becoming increasingly blurred when it comes to their seasonal patterns and the habitats where they can be found.

Warmer, wetter winters and temperature increases have been linked to changes in tick activity, influencing behaviours in both host-seeking ticks and the diapause (a period of suspended development in an insect).

Habitat

Changes in environmental conditions and control can also affect tick risk by extending the insect's preferred habitats. A prime example of this is in the spread of bracken. Areas of dense bracken heighten tick risk by providing attractive shelter.



Bracken provides favourable conditions for ticks.

Hill flocks are at greater risk due to the favourable conditions upland habitats offer in the forms of dense vegetation and the warm, humid conditions ticks prefer. Implementing proper control methods and aiming to reduce favoured tick habitats is strongly recommended.

One priority is to clear bracken litter, which is important for tick survival between active feeding. Controlling frond cover is similarly vital as it provides questing habitat and the humid microclimate essential for tick activity.

Concerns

Worldwide concerns about tick responses to climate gradient shifts are growing and the British Isles in particular is showing major negative trends. Experts in this area suggest there is a need for government support for farming activities to include tick and zoonotic disease control as a public good.

Professor Roy Brown, a researcher into tick-borne disease ecology and management, highlights the need the change, due to the 'worrying change' in the pattern of tick numbers, activity and rates of pathogen presence, resulting in sheep, cattle and dogs all showing a dramatic increase in tick-borne disease over the last 20 years.

Whether or not such support is forthcoming, it is clear better environmental control measures, awareness in maintaining good flock health and tick-borne disease prevention is becoming more important than ever for many UK sheep flocks.

Watch an NSA and Moredun tick and tick-borne disease webinar at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.



Sheep ticks are increasing in numbers and geographical distribution.

Ticks and tick-borne diseases

- The sheep tick, *Ixodes Ricinus*, can pick up and pass on many tick-borne diseases that impact human and animal health.
- Surveillance work suggests the tick presence in Great Britain rose from 20% in 2010 to 42% in 2017 and 55% in 2021.
- Surveys suggest a 13% tick presence on sheep holdings with 6% of sheep positive for tick-borne disease, rising to 48-100% and 40+% on farms in Scotland, North Wales and North West England.
- Tick-borne diseases include lyme disease, babesiosis and tick-borne fever.
- *Anaplasma spp* causes immune response challenges and may be the cause of barren or thin sheep.
- Louping ill virus (a relation to tick-borne encephalitis virus) has recently been confirmed as present in the UK.

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Following the flock

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

Richard Vines

NSA Marches Region Chair, Herefordshire

As we emerge from lambing into the start of another growing season, I always allow myself a short period of reflection to consider lessons learnt.

Every year is different and this winter, for the first time in a while, I had no turnips on farm. Cover crop was planted on all fields going into spring cropping but my trial of a straight westerwold grass ley proved a small win as the hard frosts almost completely decimated the phacelia, clover and rye mixes.

While there was some regrowth, it didn't amount to much feed to hold the in-lamb ewes when they returned from off-farm grazing. The westerwolds, however, although planted later than I would have hoped, grew vigorously and filled the stopgap providing plentiful food for them, the outwintered rams and now the continuing growth has given the first mob of ewes with lambs at foot a great start.

I will exploit this vigour further next year but endeavour to include turnips again, as I find the concentration of high value feed in them is hard to beat.

Lambing seems to have gone fairly well. Numbers are a little lower but the vigour of lambs has been great – so let's hope the season ahead is kind.

This year has been challenging as I was stopped from driving due to a health issue. Family and friends have rallied around and use of a camera has helped minimise travelling at lambing. They say you don't appreciate things until you lose them, and I cannot wait until the DVLA allows me my freedom again!



Richard's trial with a new grass ley proved worthwhile over winter.



Olly's flock is adapting to life on higher ground after the recent move.

Olly Matthews

NSA South West Region Chair, Somerset

A move from North Somerset to the edge of Exmoor means things have changed significantly for me in recent months.

Moving a whole farm's worth of kit and stock 60 miles has been challenging and not something I would want to do regularly. But we've received a warm welcome from the local community and have settled in well on the new farm.

We have nearly finished lambing. I don't think this year is going to break any records but we have a good crop of lambs on the ground. Slow grass growth this spring has been challenging, but we're currently understocked so have managed to get through. Some of the older ewes have found the move uphill and tight grazing a challenge, but everyone assures me the replacements we breed will perform better than those that have been moved here.

Some ewes are dirtier than I would like, perhaps under higher worm pressure than normal. Anecdotally we have found this can happen with a dry summer followed by a wet winter. I always love lambing time but find myself now busy planning next year's lambing before we've really got this one behind us!

We have inherited some GS4 herbal leys on the new farm so were able to fatten the last 150+ prime lambs without any supplements and then lamb the triplet ewes on the same ground. Both classes of stock have performed well, showing the value of legumes on farm.



Kate Hovers

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair, Powys

We may seem obsessed by the weather but at lambing it can have such a devastating, or occasionally uplifting, effect.

Looking back at the spring, I remember even more rain than in recent years. Our scanning was much the same as previous years, a reflection of living in a very wet place so not badly affected by last summer's dry spells, and lambing went quite smoothly – but I found it hard. This could reflect that I'm not getting any younger, but I am blaming the lack of sun and constant wearing of waterproofs. We housed most of the sheep a few weeks before lambing in the hope of some grass to turn them onto and kept them in for a few days where possible in the worst weather.

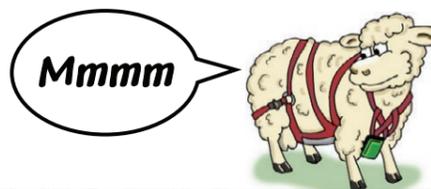
The grass is very slow to appear. The lambs have survived well but it didn't strike me how their behaviour was affected until we had two good weather days and suddenly saw them playing and running around the fields for the first time.

We will soon find out if lamb growth has been affected when we give their first vaccination and weigh them. We were lucky to get some supplies just in time for the pre lambing booster but the lack of vaccines when, as an industry we are trying to prevent disease and lower antibiotic use, is frustrating.

I will now be watching the nematodirus forecast. Although some areas have been or still are showing a high risk, our forecast here currently remains low.



The wet spring has forced lengthened housing of ewes and lambs for Kate.



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1. The Parasite Control Guide 2023, AHDB. www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/parasite-control-guide
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