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BIOSECURITY SPECIAL
FOUR-PAGE TECHNICAL QUARANTINE FEATURE
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Exports and sustainability – adapting for the future



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

There can't be many industries where you could go to a show, an industry event and/or a strategic business open day almost every day of the week.

It's getting even more congested as we see an additional swathe of events under the regenerative agriculture banner and, keen that sheep farming doesn't get left behind, NSA is continuing to do its bit. There have been four successful regional NSA sheep events this summer, presence at our devolved nation agricultural shows, and various young shepherds competitions.

Looking forward we have a brand new major event, the NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference, taking place near Birmingham on Wednesday 25th October – not to be missed.

It's to be a biannual event running concurrently with the national NSA Sheep Event at Malvern. This inaugural conference will focus on sheep health and has a programme which should appeal to any one of you keen to increase your productivity and reduce your carbon footprint through optimising health and getting on top of parasites and disease. Places are limited and its first come first served, so if you want to be there you know what you need to do.

Flock health

Sheep health is rightly getting a lot of attention. I still believe it's probably the most important thing we can improve to raise our game, although underpinned by good nutrition and genetics and requiring some record keeping if it is to be most effective. But two other topics have really come to the fore over the last few months – exports and sustainability.

The Prime Minister's farm to fork food summit in May reinforced the government's global ambitions for the UK. I may have been influenced by the breakout session I was assigned to, but it made a strong statement about exports of high quality food and drink making a significant contribution to our balance of trade.

The thinking is we should not be over reliant on EU trade and that greater rewards lie further

afield. The investment in eight new agri-food attachés to open trade opportunities reinforces this ambition, and our sheep farming industry is well versed in the importance of exports.

The AHDB export conference in June showcased the investment of levy funds in developing new overseas trade, promoting British products and supporting the work done by devolved nation levy bodies. The work being done is impressive and having an impact. It's comforting to know we are investing not just in new and emerging markets but also existing ones in the EU. New halal demand exists overseas too and this is another area of market development AHDB is investing in to good effect.

Global trade

Hot on its heels came a workshop with the newly formed Food and Drink Export Council, which was born out of the Trade and Agriculture Commission in 2021 to boost exports.

While exports are where the action is, I will warn against taking our eye off of the market right under our feet. UK consumers are closer and without them the link between industry and the public is broken.

The second topic on trend is sustainability. This is central to the reputation upon which most of our domestic and export trade relies. We have two national climate commitments we would be wise to keep in mind – net zero by 2050 and a 30% methane reduction pledge by 2030 – as well as targets for natural resources and nature recovery.

I see the new Breed for CH4nge project, a £3m UK Research and Innovation-funded programme that NSA is a partner in, as an important part of this and a great opportunity for our industry to make progress.

Unlike our New Zealand counterparts we have no specific government targets being pushed on us as sheep farmers, but we would be wise to take some ownership of these challenges and be seen to do our bit. Responsibility is an important part of reputation.

See page 6 for NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference details and page 3 for more on Breed for CH4nge.



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Nominations open for NSA awards

Nominations are now open for the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the UK sheep industry.

Following a change to the rules last year, in addition to NSA regions, breed societies and agricultural organisations making nominations, any individual NSA member can make a nomination to the selection panel (as long as another member acts as a seconder).

NSA regions are also in the process of making nominations for NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for unsung NSA Hero, an award specially for NSA staff, officeholders and supporters. If a name springs to mind for this award, get in touch with your NSA regional manager. The deadline for award nominations is Saturday 30th September. *Details of both awards at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about.*



Partnership webinars attract attention

NSA summer webinars have attracted record numbers of attendees to obtain practical advice on issues ranging from Sustainable Farming Incentive updates to worming treatments checks.

The practical webinars delivered by NSA with partners Moredun and SCOPS proved popular in July with respected experts Lesley Stubbings and Rebecca Mearns (on behalf of SCOPS) and Fiona Lovatt and Alasdair Nisbet (on behalf of Moredun) delivering excellent sessions. Don't miss the next NSA/Moredun webinar 'Tick control and louping ill' on Wednesday 20th September. *All webinars are available to watch again at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.*

Celebrating shepherds and their pies

Love Lamb Week returns the first week of September sharing messages of naturally delicious lamb with consumers via press, supermarket promotions and digital media.

The campaign brings together levy boards with NSA and other industry partners to promote lamb at a time of peak supply for UK sheepmeat.

This year's campaign will highlight recipes inspired by sheep farmers shared under the banner 'Shepherds and their pies'. As an easily affordable but often unappreciated lamb dish the campaign will encourage consumers, and those new to the delicacy, to try lamb with one of the suggested recipes. NSA is also encouraging members to get involved.

Do you have a special Shepherds pie recipe in your family? Maybe you have modern take on the classic? If so, we would love to hear about it at NSA HQ or why not share your idea on social media during the campaign using the hashtag #shepherdsandtheirpies and #LoveLambWeek.



Share your shepherds pie recipes.

University intern supports NSA's work

NSA was pleased to be joined by Reading University student Mia Heath for a month's internship this summer.

Mia is an Ecology and Wildlife Conservation student who has an interest in environmental management and agriculture. She supported NSA Policy Manager Emma Bradbury in her work, helping NSA while gaining a useful insight into the sheep sector. NSA thanks Mia for her work during the month and wishes her the very best for her future studies.



The NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale kicks off the season.

Ram sale season kicks off at Builth

As this magazine hits your doorstep, new purchases secured at the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale at Builth Wells in early August will be arriving at their new farms. The sale offered quality stock for those seeking to lamb earlier than the spring months. A full sale report, alongside those from the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale and NSA sales in the South West, Eastern and South East regions, will be included in the next *Sheep Farmer*.

Still time to join AGM

There's only a few days until the NSA AGM on Saturday 12th August, 10.30am arrival for an 11am start at Godolphin Management Co, Rutland Stud, Saxon Street, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 9RS. Attendance is open to all, but only NSA members can vote. Why not stay for the NSA Eastern Region Next Generation event, which starts at 12 noon and includes a farm tour. *More on page 4.*

Support NSA further by adding Gift Aid

Due to its status as a registered charity, NSA is in the fortunate position of being able to claim Gift Aid on membership subscriptions. This extra HMRC money is a vital boost to NSA funds, aiding the work it does for the UK sheep sector. To give NSA permission to Gift Aid on your subscription visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/giftaid.

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Paying by direct debit for your membership subscription will save you 20% in your first year. The saving can be made at any time, whether this is your first year of membership or your 10th! Do it online at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/directdebit any time before your subscription renewal date.

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Net zero sheep project begins

NSA is excited to be working alongside industry partners on a new project to breed low methane producing sheep, helping sheep farmers make a positive contribution towards net zero.

The three-year 'Breed for CH4nge - Breeding Low Methane Sheep' initiative will measure methane emissions from 13,500 sheep in 45 flocks. Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "NSA is delighted to be a partner in this highly significant research and development project to move faster to make farming more of a solution to climate change."

"This project will identify ways to reduce emissions in a way that maintains the wide range of sustainability traits inherent in many flocks. It is designed so the lessons learnt can be adopted by any breed in the future - which I see as key to improving genetics without diluting the genetic pool."



NSA Breakfast Club debates Defra update

NSA was pleased to host Farming Minister Mark Spencer and Defra Director Janet Hughes to the latest NSA Breakfast Club webinar in July.

Following the recent announcements on Sustainable Farming Incentives that now join a growing number of financial offers (England only), the webinar enabled a unique opportunity to pose questions directly to two influential decisionmakers. A discussion on the current turmoil over stocking levels in several of our upland commons gave an upland focus to part of the session.

Watch the recording at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

Industry action for vet attestation system

NSA continues to work with Defra and other industry bodies to agree more detail on an appropriate system for vet attestations coming into effect in December

In the meantime, NSA reminds members to go through the agreed attestation form with their vet at any routine visit coming up. Vet attestations will be required to demonstrate farms are free of disease and working to a specific level of biosecurity to enable exports. The form at gov.uk will need completing annually, although membership of some national assurance schemes and/or the Defra Pathway qualifies instead.

Questions remain over the transfer of vet attestations through the supply chain. For a detailed explanation of what the changes mean and qualifying accreditation schemes, please see the previous edition of *Sheep Farmer*. *Can't find your June/July Sheep Farmer? Read it online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sheep-farmer-magazine.*

Countryside COP showcases credentials

NSA will be contributing to a series of activities championing the positive impact of agriculture as part of COP28 in November.

Alongside other farming organisations, NSA will be creating a suite of case studies displaying progressive sheep farmers who have a passion for productive, profitable farming while championing the farmed environment. Case studies need to be quantitative and measurable. *Email policy@nationalsheep.org.uk for more details, to volunteer as a case study or make a nomination.*



New SFI actions offer encouraging support.

New SFI developments

Having previously stated it was keen to see progress, NSA has been vocal in its satisfaction with further developments to the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) this year.

It is encouraging to see the 23 new actions on offer, specifically the developments for tenant farmers allowing businesses to apply without the need for landlord permission, along with allowing tenants to have an SFI agreement even if they are on a short, rolling tenancy contract.

NSA has been assured choices within and between SFI and countryside stewardship will become simpler in 2024 - which is vital, given concerns about the complexity of the rapid changes in farming schemes. *Updates on progress in the devolved nations on page 18-19, and more on SFI for upland farms on page 14.*

NSA disappointed by Kept Animals Bill decision

Having waited two years since the Kept Animals Bill was first read in Parliament, NSA was upset by the government's decision to only take forward individual measures for the remainder of parliament.

The bill offered better legislation and further police powers to tackle sheep worrying by dogs, so NSA has written an open letter to the Defra Minister and Police Crime Commissioner highlighting the severity and increasing instances of attacks on livestock and the inherent need for action.

The loss of the bill also means the intended ban on live exports of animals for further slaughter and fattening has not yet been implemented. This trade has stopped anyway, due to an absence of border control point live animal facilities over the channel, and NSA expects any movement to build facilities for live breeding animal exports may align with the government pushing prohibition of slaughter stock.



Sheep worrying by dogs remains a concern.

NSA Regions

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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 Eastern Region

By **Josh Brock, Manager****In June NSA Eastern Region invited members to Cambridge University's sheep and dairy farm for a farm walk and lamb barbecue.**

Farm Manager Paul Kelly and shepherd Toby Wilson conducted the tour, while local vets offered advice on practical data collection and prevention of lamb mortality.

Plans are gearing up for the NSA Eastern Region Next Generation day, hosted at Godolphin on Saturday 12th August from 12 noon, following the AGM in the morning (details on page 2). This will be an excellent event, with a farm tour and other events on offer alongside the usual competition for young shepherds.

The Region looks forward to its two NSA ram sales, the first at Rugby Livestock Market on Friday 25th August and the second on Friday 15th September at Melton Mowbray Livestock Market.



NSA Eastern Region enjoyed a farm walk at Cambridge University.

NSA Central Region

By **Lizzy Wells, Manager****Preparations are underway for September's NSA Central Region Next Generation Shepherd competition.**

There will be a farm walk for the west side of the region and a field day in Lincolnshire in October, focusing on sheep health and integration in arable rotations.

NSA Scottish Region

By **Grace Reid, Coordinator****NSA Scottish Region congratulates Chris Cousens on receiving the 2023 NSA Scotland Silver Salver award for outstanding contribution to the Scottish sheep industry.**

Dr Cousens, who was recognised primarily for her tireless research work on ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA, also known as jaagsiekte), was presented the award at the Royal Highland Show.

The region would like to thank all members and visitors who came to the NSA Scottish Region Sheep Centre at the Royal Highland Show and look forward to seeing you again at future events.



First Minister Humza Yousaf visited the NSA marquee.

NSA South West Region

By **Ian May, Manager****The region is looking forward to a farm walk on Thursday 24th August at Raddy Farm, Instow, Devon, EX39 4LW, part of the Christie Devon Estate, managed organically with sheep, herbal lays and forage crops.**

There are also plans for an autumn event with AHDB, the Exmoor Hill Farming Network and the Sheep Group. The evening will outline the importance of the ethnic market in supporting demand and farm-gate prices, and how farmers can tailor their systems to better target this market.

Several members have reported significant losses due to louping ill, linked to an increase in ticks and the unavailability of a vaccine. Events are planned in Dartmoor on Monday 21st August and Exmoor on Tuesday 22nd August, with local vet practices and representatives from Moredun, to discuss new vaccine progress and disease management strategies. Contact me for details and to book any events.



The regional Next Generation Shepherd competition was a great success.

NSA Marches Region

By **Katie James, Manager****Keen young shepherds and those looking to learn new skills came together for a fantastic day at the NSA Marches Region Next Generation Shepherd competition and training event in July.**

Kindly hosted by Holme Lacy College, Herefordshire, the day saw 19-year-old Ben Edwards from Ledbury, Herefordshire, emerge as the winner. The 2021 winner, Tom Garlick from Hereford, was in close second. Both will move forward to compete in the national finals at NSA Sheep 2024.

Congratulations to all competitors for demonstrating a high level of knowledge and practical skill. Thanks to all sponsors, Holme Lacy and the regional committee for their support.

NSA Northern Region

By **Chris Adamson, Manager****NSA North Sheep really was an event to remember. The regional committee is in the final processes of event wrap up and we'd love to hear any feedback.**Thank you for the hard work of the committee and the Woodman family for providing a great venue, being so welcoming and having top quality stock.
Full event report on page 9.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By **Helen Roberts, Development Officer****Following a fantastic NSA Welsh Sheep we must extend our thanks to the Owen family, local stewards, sponsors, exhibitors, judges, speakers, visitors and more who made this event memorable.**The NSA Sheep Centre at the Royal Welsh Show greeted many faces over the four days. The NSA stand welcomed local and international guests, and hosted a launch for *A Hardy Breed*, a book of photographs by Bruce Cardwell recording the lives and work of Welsh sheep farmers.A personal highlight was being presented with the Associateship of the Royal Agricultural Societies award in recognition of my contribution to the practice and development of agriculture. I'm honoured to receive this.
Full NSA Welsh Sheep report on page 8.

Helen received her ARAgS award at the Royal Welsh Show.

NSA South East Region

Sarah Blake, Manager

The region showcased the 'Journey of Wool' at the South of England Show.

James Goffin, NSA regional committee member and NSA South East Region Ram Sale Chair, organised a shearing and fleece display showcasing fleeces from 20+ breeds and demonstrations from weavers, spinners and dyers.

Later in the month, members enjoyed a farm walk at Applesham Farm, Lancing, West Sussex, kindly hosted by Hugh Passmore. Attendees discussed the mutual benefits of grazing livestock and arable enterprises, seeing ample evidence of enhanced biodiversity.

Planning is well underway for the region's second annual ram sale, held alongside Thame Farmers' Mart's second breeding sheep sale on Friday 1st September. Last year's inaugural sale attracted huge interest and we're looking forward to seeing many members selling and buying there.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By **Edward Adamson, Development Officer****As a committee we were thrilled with the success of NSA Sheep Northern Ireland this year.**

It was a fantastic day, enjoyed by all and leaving the organising committee feeling both satisfied and relieved the decision to find a farm venue was the right one. Support received from the farm hosts, sponsors, trade and the local community helped make the day a success.

Full event report on page 10.

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Join in the week of activity using #sheephealthweek on social media.

NSA embraces proactive flock health in its brand new event



NSA will celebrate the work of UK sheep farmers in keeping the national flock healthy with a dedicated 'Sheep Health Week' this October.

From breeding to nutrition, so many factors are instrumental in ensuring optimum flock health and NSA will cover many of these topics in a series of face-to-face and online events supplying producers with valuable, practical advice.

#sheephealthweek

Social media activity during Sheep Health Week will showcase the positive actions already been taken by producers, celebrating why the UK has an internationally recognised reputation for high standards of sheep health and welfare. The whole industry can get behind this positive messaging by sharing @natssheep activity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and posting their own success stories using #sheephealthweek.

A key element of the week of activity will be Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Online, an already established activity organised by

NSA South East Region. There will be three free-to-attend SHWAP Online evening webinars welcoming highly experienced and respected speakers.

Starting the discussion on Monday 23rd October, independent sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings will lead an 'Undertaking a whole flock assessment' webinar.

The 'Use of stock records and forage production data to monitor physical and financial performance' will be the focus of evening two on Tuesday 24th October, when a panel of farmer and expert advisers share their experiences, before the third and final evening, on Thursday 26th October, covering 'Building annual feed budgets, based on grazing, forage, cover crops and conserved forage'.

Registrations for SHWAP are already open and can be made via the NSA website.

Inaugural conference

Interspersed with SHWAP Online and keeping to the flock health theme, excitement is building for the inaugural NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference taking place on Wednesday 25th October 2023.

This brand new NSA event will offer a line-up of knowledgeable experts from the UK sheep sector, ready to pass on valuable information

through interactive sessions and networking opportunities.

The conference will be held at the National Conference Centre, Birmingham, close to road, rail and air links, making the day accessible to delegates from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

NSA is proud to offer three sessions featuring headline speakers as part of the conference (see panel). In between sessions, delegates will be encouraged to join interactive workshops in a new style of information sharing.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "We are excited to deliver this new event. Given how vital healthy sheep are to productive farming businesses with an eye on sustainability, lower emissions and a wide range of other public goods, the conference will dispense timely and practical advice to all who attend. It is an event not to be missed!"

Registration for SHWAP Online, sponsored by Elanco and MSD Animal Health, is free. Tickets for the NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference, with Shearwell Data as the Major Sponsor, are heavily discounted for NSA members.

More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

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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 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.



The inaugural NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference is an event not to be missed.

NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference

- With ongoing changes to UK farming policies, delegates will hear from government officials from across the UK opening proceedings and discussing 'Who does it best? A four nation approach to animal health and welfare'.
- Session two, held in conjunction with AHDB, invites you to join a panel of sheep farmers from across the UK sharing their honest experiences. This session, 'Attitude and approach: To what extent is sheep health in the hands of individual producers?', will be a fascinating insight into the mindset of producers to resolve serious animal health issues on farm.
- The final session will deliver advice on 'Wise investments. A discussion on where money is best spent to improve health, welfare and productivity'. With input costs high there has never been a better time to hear from top advisers on how to make flock expenditure go further.

NSA Welsh Sheep celebrates the best of livestock farming in Wales



Enticing thousands of visitors from across Wales, NSA Welsh Sheep was a resounding success and brought some welcome May sunshine.

The opening ceremony was distinguished by a musical rendition from Glandon Lewis, auctioneer with Welshpool Livestock Sales, the premier sponsor for the event. Mr Lewis sung in Welsh in honour of the late Dai Jones Llanilar, a popular face among the Welsh farming community who sadly passed away last year.

Highlights

Kate Hovers, NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair, commented on the excellent event: "It was a perfect day. The farm was fantastic, the grazing and stock exceptional, the weather was kind to us and Glandon's singing at the opening ceremony was something to remember."

She paid tribute to the hosts, Huw and Sioned Owen with their son Dafydd, for the work they had put into all the preparation 'with always a smile on their faces'.

Event organiser Helen Roberts agreed: "It was an absolutely fantastic day. Everyone enjoyed meeting and greeting after the long hard winter."

In addition to singing, Mr Lewis opened the event, making a call to those in power to protect the farming sectors. "Will the politicians in the Senedd in Cardiff and in Westminster please respect and protect our farming industry and support encouragement of our younger generation who are entering the industry," he said.



The farm tours were a highlight at NSA Welsh Sheep.

"We do not want this beauty to be turned into a wildlife park. We are the guardians of the land, but we are also the gardeners of the land producing food of the highest quality with passion to feed our nation."

Seminars

As a popular attraction at the event, the seminar tent drew full audiences throughout the day discussing topical issues. Meanwhile a wide range of competitions entertained the crowds with a particular highlight being the NSA Cymru/Wales Region Next Generation Shepherd competition. Taking the top title was Mena Protheroe, who studies at Llysfasai College, North Wales. Mena will now go on to represent Wales in the national finals of the competition at NSA Sheep Event, held in July 2024 in Worcestershire.



Huw (centre) Sioned (right) and Dafydd Owen were obliging hosts.



Glandon Lewis opened the event.



Competition was fierce in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd contest.

NSA Welsh Sheep

Tuesday 16th May 2023 at Red House Farm, Newtown, Powys, by kind permission of the Owen family and sponsored by Welshpool Livestock Sales and HCC.

Competition results

- **NSA Next Generation Shepherd.** Mena Protheroe, Llysfasai College, North Wales (open and student).
- **Trade stands.** British Texel Sheep Society (breed society), Welsh Mule Sheep Breeders' Association (wool-on-the-hoof), Logie Durno Sheep (indoor) and Newtown College (outdoor).

Crowds and officials welcomed at successful NSA North Sheep event



The return of NSA North Sheep did not disappoint, with many thousands of visitors enjoying the showcase for the sheep industry and a platform for discussion and debate.

The event was opened by Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, who acknowledged how much pressure the industry has been under. "The recent unprecedented change has for so many been difficult to adapt to, but with that now behind us, we need to look to the future and address how we are going to progress with the new government schemes on the table," he said.

Political audience

In attendance for the day was Janet Hughes, Defra's Programme Director for the Future Farming and Countryside Programme. During her visit she had audiences with farmers, as Viv Lewis, NSA Northern Region Chair, explained:

"We took this opportunity to make sure Ms Hughes spoke to as many different sheep farmers as possible, young and old, lowland and upland, commercial and specialist. This enabled her to hear from the horses' mouth the concerns and worries for the future and suggestions as to how Defra can make their schemes more appropriate and fit for purpose, for sheep farms of all types."

For many the highlight of the day was the farm tour. This presented a tremendous

opportunity to view the Woodmans' 930-acre (375ha) traditional Northumberland arable and livestock farm.

The well attended seminar programme included a range of topics from 'Resilience to change' to 'Getting a foothold on the sheep farming ladder'. The results of Bradford House Farm's carbon audit were also presented in a dedicated session about turning the challenge of attaining net zero into an opportunity.

Shepherd competition

Many younger farmers came together to take part in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition. Winning the Ali Johnson Perpetual Trophy and achieving first place was Michael Hogg from Washington, Tyne and Wear.

Ms Lewis continued: "It was brilliant to see so many people at the event, getting to meet with people that in some cases we haven't seen in quite some time. The buzz was fantastic. The Woodman's family farm was of course the highlight, a tremendous farming enterprise with the most tremendous showcase of livestock.

"As we all look to the future of farming, I was interested to hear Willie Woodman speaking about his farm's carbon audit, and it was great to see him encouraging other farmers to undertake one.

"Thank you to everyone who has made today possible. The Woodman family, sponsors, committee volunteers and the thousands of people who attended."



Michael Hogg took the title of NSA Northern Region Next Generation Shepherd of the Year.

NSA North Sheep

Wednesday 7th June 2023 at Bradford House Farm, Belsay, Northumberland, by kind permission of the Woodman family and sponsored by Hexham & Northern Marts.

Competition results

- **NSA Next Generation Shepherd.** Michael Hogg, Tyne and Wear.
- **Trade stands.** Hexham & Northern Marts (indoor), Carrs Billington (outdoor), Blackface Sheep Breeders Association (breed society), Teeswater Sheep Breeders Association (wool-on-the-hoof) and T.C. Whiteford (breeders).



Bradford House Farm offered the perfect space for visitors.



The Woodman family were thanked for being such generous hosts.



The farm tour was a popular attraction throughout the day.

Record crowds enjoy a great day out at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland



A farm venue with a historic past attracted huge numbers to this year's NSA Sheep Northern Ireland after an absence of four years.

Taking place at Tynan Abbey Estate, County Armagh, this was the first time the event had been held on farm and was a new venture for the organising committee. Willing, enthusiastic and cooperative hosts Kate Kingan and Peter Mant Tynan, and an estate in a beautiful setting, helped turn the event into a new experience for both exhibitors and visitors.

The idyllic setting added a new dimension to the usual attractions, with keen competition in the varied contests taking place throughout the day. Close proximity to the border also meant visitors from the Republic of Ireland helped swell the record attendance.

Enjoyable day

Edward Adamson, NSA Northern Ireland Regional Development Officer, says: "It was a fantastic event. So many visitors commented on what a relaxing, enjoyable day it was, enquiring at trade stands and meeting with old friends not seen in a while."

Dan Phipps, NSA Chair, and Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, judged the trade stands while the Galloway & Macleod-sponsored NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition saw a good turnout of competitors keenly watched by their supporters throughout the heats.

After tough competition Alexander Boyd from Newtownabbey, County Antrim, secured first place, defending the title he previously won two years ago. Liam Doyle from Ballyward, Castlewellan, was awarded second place, and both now progress to the national finals of the competition at NSA Sheep 2024.

Farm tour

The event farm tour proved to be one of the most popular attractions, keeping those involved busy all day - even when an unexpected cloudburst temporarily dampened spirits. Farm manager Peter Mant Tynan took a break from accompanying the farm tours to give a historical tour of the estate to interested parties. The tours were enhanced by advisers who discussed farm benchmark figures and environmental opportunities and were available to answer queries.

The ever-popular sheepdog sale did not disappoint and a crowded field saw a top price of 2,000gns paid for a two-year-old dog, Castlewood Twig, sold by R. Johnston of Cookstown, County Tyrone, to Sandy and Robert Magee of Kilwaughter, County Antrim.

Mr Adamson concludes: "As the dust settles after the event, the local NSA committee feels very satisfied and relieved the decision to find a farm venue was successful. We are indebted to the hosts, sponsors, trade and the sheep farming community for all the support received. We are already looking forward to the next event."



Top price sheepdog, Twig, sold for 2,000gns.



Outdoor trade stand 1st place, Cotter Crate, with Dan Phipps

NSA Sheep NI

Tuesday 4th July 2023 at Tynan Estate, Tynan, Armagh, by kind permission of Kate Kingan.

Competition results

- **NSA Next Generation Shepherd.** Alexander Boyd, County Antrim (open). Jack Maxwell, County Londonderry (under 18).
- **Trade stands.** Bluefaced Leicester (breed society), Cotter Crate (outdoor) and CAFRE (indoor).
- **Fleeces.** Freda Magill (long staple), William Carson (short staple) and Edward Adamson (coloured).



Alexander Boyd, winning NSA Next Generation Shepherd.

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'Lamb-tastic' opportunities for UK industry to exploit growing demand

Record levels of UK red meat exports in 2022 were underpinned by sheep meat exports increasing by 7.8% in volume to 78,844t and 13% in value to £503m.

As the world's fifth largest producer and the third largest exporter of sheep meat, this puts the UK industry in a strong position to seize opportunities created by a predicted 1.8% increase in global meat consumption – says Phil Hadley of AHDB.

"Developing exports is one of the cornerstones of AHDB's work and something levy payers have requested more of," Dr Hadley says. "Working collaboratively with industry and government, AHDB is committed to providing the support to help drive sheep meat export growth."

EU market

The size of the EU market and its proximity to the UK means it will remain important for UK exporters. For example, 30% of total UK lamb production is exported and more than 90% of this is destined for the EU.

But Dr Hadley points to the global expansion of middle classes in emerging markets across the world as the factor shaping the demand for protein and imported foods. He says opportunities, especially for lamb, exist in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with strong population growth and limited production capacity meaning this area is expected to become the biggest net importer of food by 2031.

"With the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Jordan representing the greatest opportunities for lamb, the MENA region's importance and significance to the sector cannot be ignored.

"These and other global opportunities have been set out in AHDB's 'Prospects for UK agri-food exports' analysis, examining opportunities for UK producers that already exist and those that may emerge over the next decade," Dr Hadley adds.

Looking to the USA and Canada, countries that are net importers of lamb with low levels of tariff for imports, AHDB has identified quality and naturalness as characteristics important for consumers that UK exporters could capitalise on.

Dr Hadley continues: "This is where AHDB has a major role to play, working with the government and industry to not only help secure new market access but continuing to cultivate existing ones."

Ambitions

The UK Government recently committed to invest £4.6m across sectors to help support the UK's export ambitions.

"This pledge was very encouraging and will complement AHDB's £8m annual investment in exports to facilitate trade and grow our reputation as a producer of quality, safe and wholesome food," says Dr Hadley.

AHDB delivers a programme of inward missions, in-market support and a presence at major trade shows to help achieve the industry's global ambitions. For example, it will host leading exporters at ANUGA in

Cologne, Germany, in October to showcase domestic lamb to a global audience

"AHDB has recently produced a 'Beyond Borders' export strategy that sets out plans to encourage businesses to develop export potential with the help of AHDB support," Dr Hadley adds. This will include providing tools, information and advice, and practical assistance on exporting, connecting UK businesses to overseas buyers and growing the UK's reputation.

Commenting on the need for a sustained collaborative effort, Dr Hadley concludes: "The ultimate aim for the sheep meat sector, and indeed the wider red meat sector, is targeted at helping levy payers succeed and to encourage more businesses to look at exporting.

"Not only will it help improve overall returns, but it will support wider government ambitions to become a great trading nation. It is imperative to maintain momentum and build on the success of our sheep meat exports."



AHDB has invested £8m to grow the UK's positive reputation.

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Grazing sheep are a powerful, low input tool for improving soil organic matter.

Positives and negatives in governmental changes for uplands and commons

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

NSA remains committed to ensuring all types of sheep systems are recognised in the farm support schemes being developed in the four nations of the UK.

With England still some way ahead of the devolved nations in its design of the Sustainable Farming Incentive, it is pleasing to see recent moves to more even payment rates across the stratified sheep system – but NSA still has concerns about the effect of new actions on the uplands and common graziers.

Defra has announced a further 23 actions for the SFI 2023 application period, allowing businesses to combine as many actions in an agreement as needed with no minimum land area requirement. There will also be the option to add more actions and eligible land to an agreement each year.

Farmers who signed up for SFI 2022 will have their agreements terminated, with a required six months' notice, before they can enter SFI 2023. SFI 2023 will have a controlled roll out this August.

Defra has assured NSA this transition will be seamless and with no gaps, and that it will be dealing with both 2022 transfers and new SFI applicants. Farmers involved in the original SFI pilot scheme will continue to operate their agreements until conclusion.

Fair payments

From 2024 Defra will be offering an updated version of options, designed to make them more accessible and workable to upland farmers. Push back from NSA on variable payments rates categorised by farming location has since been acknowledged and Defra has committed to making some countryside stewardship payment rates equal for upland and lowland farms for the

Changes to payment rates for actions.

Action	Old rate	New rate
GS5: Permanent grassland with very low inputs (SDA).	£98	£151
GS2: Permanent grassland with very low inputs (non-SDA).	£151	£151
SW10: Seasonal livestock removal on grassland (SDA).	£77	£115
WD12: Creation of upland wood pasture.	£333	£544

same actions (see table).

While these commitments on SFI are welcome, NSA remains nervous separate activity by Natural England as a government body undermines the viability and future of UK commons.

Things were brought to the fore in February when Natural England wrote to commoners' associations representing some 900 farmers with grazing rights on Dartmoor, Devon, saying many of them would have to stop winter grazing and also reduce summer grazing by as much as 80%.

Concerns

This was followed in June by Natural England confirming West Penwith Moors and Downs, Cornwall, would receive protected status as a new 7,500-acre (3,000ha) Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Penwith Moors has a long history of livestock grazing, with many of the 4,000-year-old field systems still used for their original purpose.

NSA and many rights' holders across England are worried about Natural England shoe-horning thousands of acres into a one-size fits all approach without properly assessing or evidencing the true state of the commons. This raises fears Natural England has hidden objectives.

Following action from West Country MPs, Defra has agreed to conduct an independent inquiry into the controversial proposals on Dartmoor -

and NSA continues to argue this must address contentious assessment methods used across all English commons.

Stewardship extension

Natural England has proposed a one-year extension to existing stewardship agreements, with no reduction in livestock numbers for most areas. This would then be followed by a four-year agreement extension taking into consideration the findings of an independent review. Alternatively, where appropriate agreed management is in place, agreement holders could opt for a five-year extension to higher-level stewardship agreements.

In the latest NSA Breakfast Club session, Defra Director Janet Hughes discussed the implications of the 1+4 model being specific to Dartmoor but recognised issues faced on Dartmoor were similar across commons.

NSA is continuing to ensure allowances made to commons in South West England are mimicked across England.

NSA draws members' attention to the Countryside Stewardship facilitation fund to support the often complex facilitation needed to bring together groups of farmers to agree applications focused on increasing environmental outcomes locally.

Sheep sector reliant on better medicine records

NSA is enthused at the current uptake of medicine recording through the online Medicine Hub, but would like to see greater uptake going forward.

Medicine Hub is an industry-driven initiative supported by numerous industry representatives across the supply chain. It was developed on industry request by AHDB to provide evidence of the ruminant sector's responsible approach to the use of antibiotics.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "Antibiotics have a really important role in managing the health of animals but must be used appropriately. Sheep farmers are generally doing a good job and are accepted as being relatively low users, but without a national database to measure use, it's impossible to evidence or understand what is happening at a national or regional level, and individual farms have little to compare themselves with."

"The UK really needs to understand what is being used, at what rate and in which species – the Medicine Hub is offering this facility."

Development

Now, with the addition of a recommendation to upload data to Medicine Hub or an equivalent in the new Red Tractor assurance scheme standards, the speed at which a national picture is developed should gather pace.

"Red Tractor has added this recommendation in response to demand from industry and NSA supports this recommendation," Mr Stocker explains.

Eager not to add to heavy workloads and to avoid the need to dual report, the team behind Medicine Hub has been working with vets and farm management software providers to streamline the process.

"The majority of data on the hub has come via vet practices as the primary source of veterinary sales information. Involving the farm vet is often the best route to upload data," explains vet Dr Mandy Nevel from Medicine Hub.

"The data will always belong to and be under the control of the farmer. All you need to do is grant permissions to your vet and they can access the account in the same way you can, allowing antibiotic data uploaded on your behalf."

Evidence

National data providing evidence for the UK ruminant sector's responsible use of antibiotics will be an advantage in trading negotiations with both EU and global customers.

For an individual farmer tracking use over time, benchmarking against other similar farm types and taking input from their vet can be helpful in managing animal health and responsible antibiotic use.

Mr Stocker concludes: "Whether you are a low, average or periodic user, the information is hugely valuable for individual farms and industry. Building the volume of data will help the sector provide greater evidence of its high standards of health management and responsible use of antibiotics. I would encourage all sheep farmers to contribute." *More at www.medicinehub.org.uk.*



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What can you do to contribute to climate change and net zero targets?

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

Agriculture is one of the few sectors that can both contribute to mitigation and sequestration of carbon emissions, meaning farmers play a key role in achieving net zero targets.

In the UK, agriculture is the source of 10% of total greenhouse gas emissions. In comparison, in 2020 the transport sector was calculated to be responsible for 24%, energy supply sector for 21%, business 18% and residential 16%.

The UK agriculture sector has set itself a target of achieving net zero by 2040. Reaching this target could be abetted by standardising greenhouse gas data to establish baselines, combined with utilising future farming schemes to build resilient businesses that aid the environment.

While achieving net zero is an important aim for the livestock sector, the low carbon practices used to achieve this are also key for sustainability and resilience in future agriculture.

A recent report by the Centre for Innovation and Excellence in Livestock (CIEL) says for the sector to achieve the ambitious reduction in emissions, current practices and technology could only deliver a 24% reduction, therefore innovation is essential. NSA is looking at the recommendations of this report and how they could be implemented on sheep farms in the journey towards emission reduction.

Reducing emissions

Research has demonstrated greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced significantly through improved livestock management such as health and genetics, nutrition, waste and land management and accelerating innovation.

The health and genetics actions shown to have the biggest impact is boosting immunity through vaccination against endemic disease,

while improving health and welfare across management practices can also ensure sustainable productivity.

The report also compounds the need for standardised carbon calculators, something NSA has been calling for, along with a national reporting and verification process. There are also opportunities for genetic improvements, enabling genetics to be chosen specifically to focus on lowering methane emissions from enteric fermentation, for example. Although it is some way off, the Precision Breeding Bill may pave the way for technology to come up with solutions.

Methane inhibitors in feed are an interesting opportunity, with several products at various stages of market readiness offering potential emissions reductions of 12-37%. Although the government is anticipating entry of safe and high efficacy products to the UK market from 2025, no methane inhibitor is currently available in a consistent, effective and safe dosage for grazing animals.

Carbon storage

The CIEL report found UK soils store around 10bn tonnes of carbon, roughly equivalent to 80 years of annual UK greenhouse gas emissions, stored in two different ways; either inorganically (minerals) or organically (organic matter). Agricultural soils store almost half of the UK soil carbon stock (pasture 29% and arable 16%). It is estimated UK grassland soils sequester an average of 242kg/ha/year of carbon.

Therefore, agriculture can impact soil organic carbon stocks considerably. For instance, manure from grazing livestock can return or sequester carbon into the soil and, if kept under permanent grazed pasture, soils can accumulate carbon for several decades.

However, research from the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) has shown soil can

reach an equilibrium after 20 years – meaning no additional carbon can be stored – although when kept as grass the carbon will be stored safely.

Access to working demonstration farms showcasing different management practice options and ways to achieve net zero have and will continue to be an important resource in reaching climate change goals.

The biggest impact on farm is likely to come from healthy, productive animals, so the main message is to put a focus on nutrition, fertility and parasite management. Animal health and genetic improvement should all be key ambitions. Add to this investment in soil health by maximising actions that improve soil organic matter, soil life and soil structure to impact on reducing and balancing emissions.

There are many tools within the industry to help measure, analyse and improve farm emissions and the key first step is to find out where you currently are then build on improving it.

We are in a good position. British lamb is a global leader in sustainability and is some of the most climate-friendly red meat in the world. It is vital future studies highlight the evidence of grassland as a carbon sink, biodiversity on farm, CO₂/kg of protein and the benefits of species rich swards, alongside other environmental benefits offered through sheep farming.

UK climate change commitments

- A global average temperature increase of 1.1°C since the 19th century has caused more frequent and intense consequences.
- In 2019 the government signed legislation legally committing the UK to net zero target emissions by 2050. The target means no longer adding to the current greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere.
- The UK Government also signed the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, a legally binding international treaty on climate change to ensure the global average temperature remains <2°C.
- Meeting the 2050 net zero targets will aid our commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement.



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¹Davies (2018) 'Iceberg' infectious disease of sheep. SHAWG conference, Tamworth.

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Progress on carbon emission monitoring and future farming schemes in NI

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Things are gathering pace in the push for agriculture to participate in Northern Ireland's ambitions to become net zero.

Daera will publish its first climate action plan later this year which, subject to public consultation, will contact the first tranche of specific climate change mitigation measures.

Net zero

Of equal importance, consumers for our lamb and other food products will increasingly want hard evidence of the local farming industry's progression towards net zero. The days are over when we can simply say agriculture in NI is one of the most climate-friendly in the world. The Northern Ireland Executive has been clear it wants accredited data to back this up.

Farmers will be asked to participate in a carbon survey every three years, on the same day

as their farm quality assurance scheme inspection but as separate processes.



Carbon emissions surveys are to be done as standard in NI.

The NI farm assurance scheme has announced a carbon survey, the result of a pilot programme NSA Northern Ireland Region was involved in and a response to decisions by the Northern Ireland Executive to reduce carbon emissions. LMC has stressed the survey has no bearing on

the outcome of an assurance inspection and vice versa, with no pass or fail criteria associated with the survey. Its purpose is to generate a carbon footprint for individual farm businesses.

Emissions survey

Details of on-farm questionnaires have been agreed with the time taken to complete it dependant on the number of individual enterprises contributing to a farm business.

To aid progress in reducing carbon emissions through better breeding and more efficient livestock, the ruminant sectors have formed the Sustainable Ruminant Genetics Group (SRG).

NSA is concerned sheep have not been included in the present programme but is assured by SRG it will work with Daera to incorporate sheep into the genetics programme soon. We are also told the recent report by the NI Sheep Industry Taskforce, outlining its vision for the future of the sheep sector, will be considered.

One step forward and two steps back for Scottish Government decisions

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



This year has brought us many things in Scotland – some welcome, but others not.

We have seen the introduction of vet attestations, denial of asulam authorisation, further debate on lynx reintroduction – but alongside steps forward for a louping ill vaccine, just transition plans and finally some incremental movements on an Agriculture Bill. It remains a no-brainer our industry needs clear and timely guidance to plan for the future.

A recent NSA Scottish Region survey on predation highlighted the majority of participants were very concerned on the proposal of lynx reintroductions. On a scale of 1 (not concerned) to 100 (very concerned) the average response was 90.

Sheep scab

Collective, UK-wide efforts on sheep scab continue. The Lewis and Harris sheep scab control pilot project is progressing well, estimating the

prevalence of scab on the islands is around 20% with a number of locations of concern identified. However, no evidence of macrocyclic lactone resistance has been found to date and there are resources to recruit more farmers in the future and raise awareness ahead of the next breeding season.

OPA solutions

A Scottish Government working group on Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma (OPA), chaired by NSA, continues to meet to explore control, mitigation and prevention options. While scanning for OPA is not always a guarantee, it is one of the best tools available when used regularly to determine infection.

Lack of expertise in diagnosis is the limiting factor, as experienced scanners are few and far between. Many competent vets are working

hard to rectify this matter while providing an unmatched service of tailored advice. It is this relationship between vet and farmer Scottish Government wishes to enhance via its new agricultural policy, and NSA Scottish Region encourages members to explore the funding now available for this.



Scottish Government is offering support for flock health actions.

NSA and Welsh sheep farmers appalled by rise in dip disposal costs

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Despite protests from the farming industry, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) introduced new regulatory fees and charging regime for sheep dip permits and permit variations on 1st July.

NSA is dismayed at the announcement, which sees the cost of new applications for land spreading of spent or unused sheep dip rising from £402 to £3,728, arguing it puts the health and welfare of the nation's flock at risk by disincentivising dipping and encouraging the use of injectables, potentially speeding up the development of anthelmintic resistance. It also puts Welsh farmers at a direct disadvantage to producers not subject to these costs.

NSA argues the change is especially troubling as it comes at the same time as the whole industry is getting behind the recently launched

All-Wales Sheep Scab Eradication programme, meaning scheme participants will see an increased cost burden once the three-year scheme is completed.

Bracken control

Similar to the decision in Scotland, Welsh Government has refused an application for an emergency authorisation for the asulam-based bracken herbicide. It's a disappointing blow, as authorised use in England has been granted yet Welsh upland farmers will now struggle to control bracken, which is invasive and poses significant threats to livestock, biodiversity and public health.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is finding it difficult to disseminate the positives in feedback from the Welsh Government on the responses by NSA and others to the Sustainable Farming Scheme consultation. It is pleasing to see sheep farmers being the lead respondents, but the lack

of decisiveness from Welsh Government is disappointing, with an unhelpful 'under consideration' response to too many suggestions.

NSA has raised concerns over the insistency on doubling down on 10% tree cover and will be finding opportunities to remind Welsh Government this is a farming scheme and should prioritise the voice and evidence of the farming community.



Emergency asulam authorisation has been refused in Wales.

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Jam-packed summer with more to come



From ram giveaways to sheepdog training days, it has been a full-on summer of activities for NSA Next Generation with plenty more to come.

As part of new regional NSA Next Generation workshops, keen young sheep farmers have been welcomed to events during the past few months providing advice and guidance on preparation of sheep for showing or sale, and an introduction to sheepdog handling.

The practical 'Preparing for show and sale success' workshop in late May, kindly hosted by experienced and highly regarded sheep breeders the Sercombe family at their home, Sandlands Farm, Leicestershire, attracted more than 40 young shepherds. The successful sheep breeding family and industry experts covered each step needed to correctly prepare stock for show or sale.

Showing prep

Katie James, NSA Communications Manager, says: "Displaying pedigree stock at agricultural shows is the highlight of the year for many so understandably continues to attract new competitors. This workshop attracted those yet to step foot in the ring, as well as those with some experience looking for tips. Thanks to the Sercombe family for their hospitality, providing their farm as an ideal venue and for passing on their many years of experience."



Into July and highly regarded sheepdog trainer Ed Hawkins passed on his top tips from his base in Suffolk. Those attending enjoyed demonstrations on how to start training with a new puppy and were able to get specific advice for issues experienced with their own dogs.

The interactive workshops will continue into the autumn with days planned to promote Love Lamb week in September and an introduction to the value of wool and shearing later in the year. All workshops are free to attend and offer new and young sheep enthusiasts a great way to meet like-minded people while gaining new skills and knowledge.



The chance to win ram vouchers proved popular with the Next Generation.

Ram giveaway

Another popular feature of the NSA Next Generation programme, the NSA Next GENE-eration ram giveaway, returned this summer. Having previously joined up with Rob and Jo Hodgkins of Kaiapoi Romneys, this year's giveaway also welcomed the Dutch Spotted Sheep Society to the initiative. NSA is certain winning the ram vouchers will help individuals progress their flocks and business ambitions.

Applications to win were received from across the UK and NSA looks forward to sharing news of the winners in the next issue of this magazine. Details of NSA Next Generation events at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

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NSA Ambassador adapts to balance shepherding with motherhood



The arrival of two baby girls since she became an NSA Next Generation Ambassador six years ago means Alexandria James has learnt a lot about the importance of being adaptable and open to change.

"It's safe to say trying to juggle a shepherding career, our own flock and family is interesting! But it's rewarding and I wouldn't change it for the world," she says.

Alexandria established her flock of pedigree Poll Dorset ewes at her home in North Devon in 2013. Joining these now are small numbers of Southdown and Dorset Horn ewes, destined to be the interest of her two young daughters in coming years.

The flock, excluding the Southdowns, is lambed outside in September. All are performance recorded and 'have to earn their keep' to escape Alexandria's strict culling policy.

Employed shepherd

Alexandria took on an employed shepherd role in 2018 following her year on the ambassador programme, working with more than 3,000 New Zealand Romneys and New Zealand Suffolks for the Dineley family at Stonehill Romneys, Dorset, having done contracting for the flock for a few years before. But after testing positive for toxoplasmosis while pregnant with her first daughter, she took the decision to move from this position to focus on her family and own flock.

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 is catching up with various ambassadors from different intake years, to see what they're up to now. In this edition it's Alexandria James, who joined the programme in 2017.

Alexandria comments: "My husband, who is a fulltime gamekeeper, ended up picking up a lot of the slack with sheep work while I was pregnant. As a young woman in the industry, I didn't think about how having a family would impact my only career choice. I regret not leaving myself with more options."

Having originally aspired to run a large stud flock, Alexandria decided to change her approach when she found the lack of local grazing and increased expenses left her stressed and made turning a profit difficult.

She explains: "In 2021 I sold half our flock and decided to focus on less is more. If I can maintain a smaller nucleus flock, if and when the right opportunity comes along, we can still expand with the same genetics. Safe to say that in the drought last year I felt relieved we'd halved our stock numbers."



Alexandria hopes her daughters will share her love of sheep farming.

Currently Alexandria is running sheep on approximately 200 acres (80ha) of own and share farmed ground. The partnership on 140 acres (56ha) to share farm regeneratively started in autumn 2022 and is going well so far.

Winter grazing

"We also graze a mixture of local dairy leys and downland in the winter when our stock numbers are higher," explains Alexandria. "I've struggled to find anyone willing to grow cover crops and/or brassicas, which I feel would allow us to be more efficient in achieving higher daily liveweight gain in lambs and maintaining body condition score in ewes, potentially allowing us to up numbers again. This is something I hope to achieve in the future."

In May this year Alexandria also returned to her contract shepherding business – but again, with a slight change in direction, based on her previous experience.

"I'm now focusing on flock management and advice, as well as physical shepherding," she says. "For the first time I've decided to also aim for smaller clients who require the whole package. I provide everything they need to get the shepherding jobs done."

"I'm also doing marketing and social media management for farms and farming businesses. This is something my clients have continued to ask me for some time to look into."

Another string to Alexandria's bow will soon be project manager for the Poll Dorset Centurion Breeders Group's involvement in the recently launched Breed for CH4nge project.

"It's exciting to be part of this and I think it's great we're all working together as an industry to make a change," she says.

More on Breed for CH4nge on page 3.



The family begun showing their Poll Dorset flock with success in 2022.

Thirty years in ram sales flies by through the support of 'positive people'



By Jane Smith, NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales

Spending 30 years in the hotseat, organising one of the most important ram sales in Europe has never dimmed my enthusiasm.

It is a demanding but thoroughly enjoyable role that I hold for the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales. I would never have envisaged this as my career path growing up. Despite attending agricultural college and being very interested in livestock, circumstances took me away from farming for many years.

I was married to a Scottish racing driver and spent many years racing in all parts of the world, but returned to the sector when I took up the position of Monmouthshire Show Secretary, at that time one of the largest one-day shows in the country. I worked there for several years and, when I saw the ram sale position, decided to go for it.

Variety

I have done a variety of things in the past and I think this gives you an ability to cope with different situations, and I would tell my younger self not to be phased by new experiences.

In my first year of the job I was met with the sight of 22 marquees on the Royal Welsh Showground, housing nearly 10,000 sheep from around 35 breeds – an indication of the scale of the challenge I had taken on.

And then there were the sheep breeders, for many of whom it was the most important day of the year. I realised then it would be a steep learning curve.

The saying 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread' epitomises the first sales. I had show experience but hadn't realised the enormity of the ram sale until I arrived on the showground. It would have been helpful for a hand over from someone with past knowledge of the job and, although I admit I'm the world's worst at



Jane credits the ram sale committee with making her job much easier.

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 latest contributor to this series is Jane Smith, NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Executive Director.



Jane has led the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales team for 30 years.

delegating, having had little help at the start was an important lesson – in the importance of sharing tasks and information when you can.

I have learnt so much. I have come to understand the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale in September is to some vendors their 'harvest money' for the year. That means it is vital to get it right, but I'd remind my younger self we all make mistakes. My advice on this is to hold your hand up, take responsibility and get it sorted when the mistake occurs.

Perseverance

It would be good to let my younger self know there will be challenges to face but, with perseverance and dedication, you and the sale can survive these things. When I started there was no

licensing and very little in the way of health and safety, no tup taxis, but 10,000 sheep. And then there were the unpredictable challenges such as foot-and-mouth and bluetongue outbreaks, heat waves and a diesel crisis. But all were managed and lessons learnt.

I have been grateful to have always enjoyed the full support of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale Committee when having to make important and instant decisions. I really appreciate this and would never have stayed in position so long if the job hadn't been full of great people.

My advice to the younger generation would be to surround yourself with positive people who will support your work and make it enjoyable. For me, that is what has made 30 years in the same job simply fly by.



Jane was honoured to receive an award for her service from Princess Anne.

Advisers inspire confidence to make changes to farming enterprises



By Katie James, NSA

The winners of last year's NSA Next Generation and Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) competition are all demonstrating how independent advice can provide confidence to drive sheep enterprises forward.

The competition prize of mentoring from an experienced sheep consultant has helped all three winners overcome self-doubt and the safety of tradition to make successful on-farm changes.

Having his eyes opened to previously unseen opportunities, Euan Sanderson from Biggar, Lanarkshire, quickly realised the benefit of working with an impartial adviser, Rhidian Jones of RJ Livestock Services.

Prior to Rhidian's visit, Euan and his family were running a traditional system but were aware bought-in sheep were underperforming. Rhidian soon identified moving the system to a closed flock would remove this issue, as well as reducing replacement costs.

Closed flock

Euan says: "We have recently purchased 100 hogs bred specifically for their maternal qualities to close the flock long term. We are also trying to implement more rotational grazing to utilise grass better. A recently purchased autoclamp sheep handler should help improve data collection that will help us become more efficient in the future."



But Euan considers the most valued advice came from having an independent pair of eyes on the system. He continues: "It was so helpful being told just what could be possible within the enterprise but also hearing from Rhidian that some of our previous ideas were good. We just needed to be persuaded to give them a go by someone else."

The benefit of being able to sound ideas out with those not directly involved in the farm has really been embraced by Euan, as he also recently joined a sheep group as part of the Farm Advisory Service.

Luke Scott Paul from Masham, North Yorkshire, received advice through the competition from Debby Brown, a RoSA member and experienced sheep adviser with Dugdale Nutrition.

The main focus for Luke was to improve lambing percentages. Following Debby's advice, he is making the bold move to change the predominant breed type on his farm, moving from three-quarter Texel ewes to Cheviot and North of England Mules.

Health screening

Luke says: "Debby also advised us to make better use of our vet, so we undertook some blood tests to identify any other reasons for poor lambing percentages, resulting in identification of an iodine deficiency. We are now going to bolus our ewes ahead of tupping rather than using a drench."

The advice and reassurance from the adviser has given confidence to make key decisions to improve the flock. "We are now implementing things we had thought about for some time, as Debby gave us the confidence to finally do them," Luke says, adding that he is also now taking on another 100 acres (40ha).

For Josh Starling from Colchester, Essex, a combination of increasingly dry, hot summers and the advice from adviser Matt Blythe of Blythe Advisory Services has led to a big change in his system.

Josh explains: "We already ran a few Poll Dorset ewes in our flock but decided after last summer's drought to move our entire flock over to the breed. We purchased in-lamb ewes, followed Matt's advice to quarantine the incoming stock, and this has been successful."

"We can lamb when we have better availability of grass and cover crops and we are also now in the process of becoming farm assured so we are able to sell all our lambs on a supermarket contract."

All three competition winners agree the advice was valuable, saying they would not hesitate to use an adviser in the future.

Learn more about RoSA and find a local adviser at www.sheepadvisers.co.uk.



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24 Oct – Gimmer Lambs

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22 Sept – Ewes, Gimmer Shearlings & Gimmer Lambs
21 Oct – All classes

Kirkby Stephen
29 Sept – All classes

Middleton in Teesdale
15 Sept – Gimmer Lambs
25 Sept – Ewes & Gimmer Shearlings

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23 Sept – All classes

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15 September

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30 September

Ruswarp, near Whitby
6 October

St John's Chapel, Weardale
10 October

Middleton in Teesdale
11 October

Kirkby Stephen
18 Oct – Aged Rams & Ram Lambs
19 – 20 Oct – Shearling Rams

Hawes
25 – 26 October – Shearling Rams
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The farm's open lambing event is a popular local attraction.



NSA Central Region Chair ensures best practice aids Lincolnshire students

By Katie James, NSA

Running a commercial business while accommodating a need to provide a site for research, innovation and enterprise is a challenge, but one that is relished by Matt Bagley, new NSA Central Region Chair.

Matt is Estate Manager at Riseholme Park Estate, part of the Lincoln University campus. The 490-acre (200ha) site is made up of 250 acres (100ha) of arable crops farmed in rotation, 160 acres (65ha) of grassland, predominantly permanent pasture parkland, and 80 acres (35ha) of woodland and university campus.

"The campus is focused on land based courses but every student has access to the Riseholme Estate regardless of their course type," he explains. "The estate provides a resource for many non-agricultural topics ranging from robotic research



Finished lambs are sold through various outlets.

and AI development to insect and ecology research. "This variation opens opportunities and it's important we view it in this way. Although we farm in a commercial manner this is not a conventional farm. We have to be accepting it is part of a larger estate there to benefit a wider group."

Matt moved to Riseholme in 2020. The position is not his first experience of juggling the varied obligations of a farm that must educate as well as meet commercial targets, previously managing the agriculture department at Reaseheath College, Cheshire, and working as Farm Director for the group of Askham Bryan Colleges, based at Newton Rigg, Cumbria, before its closure.

Restructure

On arriving in Lincolnshire, Matt set about improving the farm's sheep flock. "No key performance indicators had been followed and a lot of older sheep were here that shouldn't have been, so I set about restructuring the flock to be a high performing group of younger sheep," he says.

The farm now runs 300 breeding ewes, a mixture of North Country Mules, Texel Mules, Suffolk Mules and, this year, a trial of Cheviot Mules lambed as a direct comparison to the North Country Mule. Cheviot Mule cross Texels have also been kept as a second cross to see if there is an increase in performance and profitability.

A hybrid Charollais cross Beltex tup is used for all meat lambs, two Texel cross Beltex tups are also used as a comparison.

"It's a small flock but with lots going on," Matt says. "These varied crosses aren't run in big numbers but they give us some data to allow our own and student comparison of how the lifetime production figures of breeds compare.

"Everything is recorded. We make decisions based on the facts provided rather than the



Matt Bagley with Lizzy Wells, Assistant Farm Manager.

colour of the sheep's face. Although of course you do still need to like what you are working with and be proud of it. The informed data helps us to reduce problems and improve performance."

Extensive data recording also allows the students the experience of using EID equipment, with Matt hoping the regular recording of data becomes second nature for them.

Lambing

Ewes are lambed indoors in February/March with everything housed as close to six weeks before lambing as possible, depending on the availability of grazing and cover crops. Efforts to keep the lambing period tight, including flushing and body condition management, are working well.

"This year 85% of ewes held to their first service and lambing was completed in 34 days," says Matt. We like to have a tight lambing so we have a consistent lamb crop ready to leave the farm at a similar time.

"I like to know when we will finish lambing, hoping our previous actions will have given ewes the best chance to be in-lamb. To hold on for further cycles would be a mistake, in my opinion."

Students are all given exposure to the lambing shed from across varied courses. "It is not

uncommon to have 50 people in the shed on one day. This takes a lot of management, with health and safety inductions and rotas to prepare, but it all works well," says Matt.

The decision on whether to offer creep is made taking several annual variables into consideration. "We look at milk, growth rates and available grass," Matt explains. "Ideally everything would be finished on grass alone in 12 to 14 weeks but when the sun continues to shine and grass availability drops, we will offer it."

Grass availability in an area of the UK that is increasingly affected by lack of rainfall is something Matt is learning to manage carefully. "One thing I have learnt since arriving in Lincolnshire is to preserve your first cut and grass for lambs. You need forage made in May otherwise the grass may not be there," he adds.

Partnerships

A three-way agreement between the university, Riseholme College and a farm business tenancy partner helps the farm manage its arable rotations to overcome potential issues presented by a lack of grazing.

Matt explains: "We work together to deliver crops including winter wheat, barley, oil seed rape, sugarbeet, forage maize and then cover crops and grass in a two-year rotation. This includes reseeded some of the arable land with grass to give diversity, return soil health and act as a weed control mechanism. It also provides extra livestock grazing through winter and enables more silage production."

This move to a more sustainable grazing system is another example of how the farm is showcasing best practice for students, as is Matt's approach to the health of the Riseholme flock.

A core vaccination programme is followed including preventative measures against abortion, pasteurellosis and clostridial disease. Historical problems with footrot have been overcome with the introduction of a vaccine and an amended protocol for dealing with feet problems.

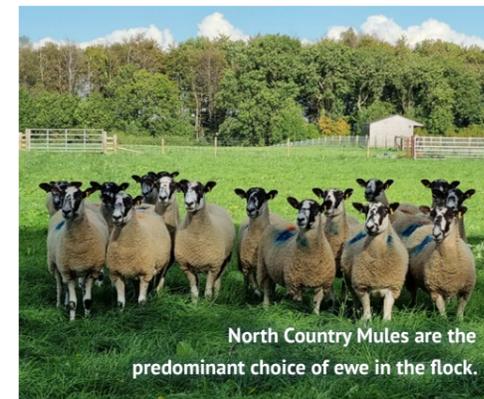


I like to know when we will finish lambing, hoping our previous actions will have given the ewes the best chance to be in-lamb.

Matt Bagley

Matt says: "We cull hard on lameness, any repeat offenders or sheep needing treatment despite being vaccinated will go."

A robust quarantine procedure is followed, which has been essential as flock numbers have grown and more brought in stock acquired. Matt is now aiming to produce all of the farm's own replacements. He explains: "This will deliver two benefits, firstly it will give students opportunity to see ewes born into the flock progress to productive animals and of course it also reduces the risk of introducing disease."



North Country Mules are the predominant choice of ewe in the flock.

The farm will also trial a new mastitis vaccine this year, having had badly affected ewes this lambing. "The cold, wet weather with lambs pulling at the udders constantly resulted in some problems, so it makes sense to try it," Matt says.

Sales

Finished lambs are sold liveweight, deadweight and, to both take advantage of the good standing of the Riseholme Estate name and positively market the university farm, also via university eateries and direct local sales.

Although the estate is managed in a way compatible with new environmental schemes, due to its need to be flexible to change at short notice, it's not part of any stewardship agreements.

Matt explains: "It's run as a commercial business responding daily to research needs and

findings. Entry into one of the environmental schemes would restrict these activities – but we do still farm in a sustainable manner. Buffer strips are left on fields, areas are left uncultivated, we have areas of wild bird cover and monitor the health of watercourses. The estate also has a flux tower capturing data on carbon sequestration."

Students

Student numbers have been on an upwards trajectory for the past 10 years including an increasing number showing an interest in sustainable farming practices and related technologies. Matt adds: "The sector is becoming more automated but capable and enthusiastic young people will still be sought after. I believe agriculture can be more of a career than it's ever been before."

It was Matt's enthusiasm for the next generation that led to him becoming involved with NSA back in 2004, through the NSA Next Generation Shepherd's competitions. He has held several NSA positions in NSA Central and Northern regions since then – and also encouraged Lizzy Wells, his assistant farm manager, to get involved, taking on the role of NSA Central Region Manager in late 2022.

"I think a lot of NSA," he says. "It does a lot of good, punching above its weight and naturally, due to my involvement with education, I'm a big fan of the NSA Next Generation programme."

Farm facts

- Riseholme Park Estate covers 490 acres (200ha) encompassing a commercial farm, woodland and university campus.
- Commercial system showcasing best practice.
- 300 North Country Mules, Texel Mules, Suffolk Mules and Cheviot Mules give varied comparison for students.
- 30-cow Red Lincoln suckler herd.



Sheep are an important part of the arable rotation.

Knowing you are not alone is key to improving rural mental health

By Emma Hayley, YANA



Farming or working in the countryside can be a good way of life but it is a demanding and stressful occupation that can leave some people feeling isolated, depressed or unable to cope.

You are not alone. One in four people in the UK will experience poor mental health so it is important to know that if you are struggling, or have someone you are concerned about, help is available.

We are an East Anglia-based charity working to help improve and sustain the mental health of those working in the countryside and use those very words as our title 'YANA – You Are Not Alone'.

Support

YANA offers four pillars of support for those involved in agriculture and rural business by: providing confidential support and funded counselling, with the YANA helpline offering a listening ear and sessions with experienced counsellors; building understanding of mental health through its website; investing in mental health training; and distributing national suicide prevention resources – 'Seven tractor facts to save a life' – with clear and simple actions anyone can take when talking to someone in distress.

Building understanding of mental health is about knowing the signs of poor mental health

and how to help yourself or others in need. Many people are reluctant to seek help when struggling to cope, but if you find yourself in this situation it's important to remember that talking about problems and seeking help can help improve your quality of life.

Warning signs

If you notice the signs that someone else is not coping well, be willing to ask how they are and be ready to listen. Ask twice and in different ways if you need to, as often people hide their true feelings. Signs someone is not coping include:

- Being distant and distracted.
- A lack of interest or motivation.
- A change in appearance or personality.
- Making arrangements for financial matters and possessions.
- Negative talk or outlook on life.
- Being over-the-top to compensate for negative feelings and thoughts.

To encourage difficult conversations, consider if your environment a good space to talk. Would being outdoors be more appropriate? Going for a walk or doing something can be a good way to instigate conversation. And remember to repeat back what you have heard to clarify what they have told you. This helps them as much as you.

It's important to remember yourself at all times but particularly if you're trying to help someone

who is struggling. Be aware of your own stress levels and mental health. Create time to reflect and notice how you are feeling. Identify who is in your support network. And take time for yourself to do things that you enjoy.

If you are ever concerned about someone feeling suicidal, be direct and ask them if they have had thoughts of self-harm or ending their life. If they have, a conversation can bring relief. If they have not, it will not put the idea in their head.

If they disclose they have, stay calm and seek help by calling an organisation such as the Samaritans.

Find out more about YANA's work at www.yanahelp.org or access the helpline on 03003 230400.

Asking how someone is and listening can help.



Steps to help others

- Be curious and ask questions.
- Don't judge.
- Offer reassurance and hope that it may be difficult right now, but it won't always be this way.
- Encourage professional help, such as seeing a GP, a counsellor, contacting YANA or other support organisations.
- Find out if there are family and friends who can offer support.
- Agree a plan. Are they going to make an appointment? Talk to a family member? Make time to do something they used to enjoy, for which they might need your help?
- Check in with them in a few days.

Worried about someone? Please remember:

TRACTOR FACTS to save a life...

- T**ell the person you're worried about them
- R**eaching out to someone in distress could save a life – listen in a non-judgemental way
- A**sking if they are thinking of suicide or ending their life is not easy, but if a person has a plan and the means to take their own life, they need urgent help
- C**are – stay with them
- T**ry to stay calm and supportive
- O**ffer to help them: to call their GP, take them to A&E or contact the police. (See the list of helplines on this card)
- R**emove the means – keys to chemical stores, firearms, drugs...

Not everyone who thinks about suicide will tell someone or give any indication at all of their intention. However, these are some warning signs that we can all look out for and ACT to save a life:

- ☺ Appearing 'recovered' after a period of depression
- 🍷 Alcohol and drug misuse
- 🔪 Possessing lethal means
- 🚗 Feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- 📖 Feeling like a burden to others
- 🗑️ A sense of hopelessness or no hope for the future
- ☠️ Frequently talking about death
- 👤 Social isolation or feeling alone
- 📄 Giving things away
- ⚡ Aggressive or irritable behaviour
- 👥 Feelings of not belonging
- 📝 A history of self-harm
- ☁️ Dramatic changes in mood & behaviour
- ⚠️ Engaging in risky behaviours



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WORTH EVERY PENNY

New traceability scheme introduced to track wool from farm to product

By Gareth Jones, British Wool



British Wool trialled a pilot scheme in 2021 that sold 500 tonnes of 100% traceable wool at a significant premium above the auction price, with the additional value being returned to members.

On the back of this success four grading depots, handling 65% of wool delivered to British Wool, processed fully traceable wool in 2022. This year, the remaining four grading depots have had the traceable scheme implemented, meaning 100% of wool delivered to British Wool will be traceable.

Not all the wool will attract a premium for this level of assurance, but by offering full traceability British Wool is ensuring it caters for buyers that want it. And demand is growing. On top of the four main brands that purchased traceable wool in the pilot scheme, five more brands have bought it over the last year. Looking forward, British Wool hopes more of its buyers are adding value to their product by selling it as using 100% traceable British Wool.

Buyers

Traceability is important for wool buyers as it ensures their products are made ethically and sustainably and allows consumers to verify the wool used was sourced from British farms.

It is also important for quality control. Throughout British Wool's eight grading depots, every fleece is assessed by hand. And with additional tracking through the supply chain, manufacturers can identify and address any issues that may arise during production, such as quality defects or contamination. This helps to ensure the final product meets the highest standards of quality.

Traceability is important for transparency and consumer confidence. By providing detailed information about the production process, manufacturers can build trust with their customers and differentiate themselves from competitors who may not be as transparent.

The process used by British Wool to implement traceability starts with the allocation of a specific QR code to each wool sheet when it arrives at

the depot. Once the wool is graded, each individual grade carries the same unique QR code that links it back to an individual farm.

QR codes

When individual grades of wool are packed into saleable lots, each lot contains the QR codes of all the farms that contributed wool. British Wool can trace this wool through the whole supply chain and award authentic traceable British Wool status to the end product.

Being able to offer full traceability is unique in the world of wool and gives its buyers confidence that British Wool is supplying one of the most sustainable fibres available that can easily be sourced back to its origin.

A completely automated system has also reduced the time spent on recording the individual grades of a members' wool, resulting in improved grading depot efficiencies, which in turn increases returns to members.



QR codes are being used to track wool sheets through processing and sale.



Automated tracking is implemented at grading.

Why do consumers care about product origin?

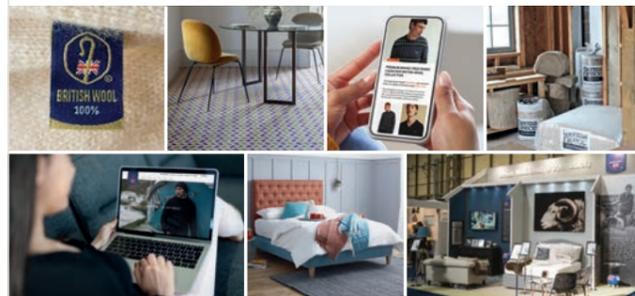
Ethics. Especially in the fashion industry, stories of sweatshops remain fresh. Consumers are increasingly interested in whether a product has been ethically made.

Sustainability. Knowing where a product is manufactured and, in turn, how far it's travelled to reach you, may mean the difference between making a sale and not.

Quality. Where the product or raw materials are sourced from is one of the most positive brand attributes.

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Preparation key to breeding sale success

Preparation is key for vendors and buyers to maximise the breeding sheep show and sale season, says the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA).



As buyers begin to travel across the country to replenish flocks, Chris Dodds of LAA says: "Auctioneers can play a key role in not only supporting your purchasing decisions, but also provide the competitive environment for vendors to achieve best price, representing their hard work in bringing their sheep to market in top condition."

According to Russell Steer of Exeter Livestock Centre, the key is to be fully prepared, with access to the best technical advice ahead of selling and showing sheep.



Auctioneers

"As a vendor, by liaising with your auctioneer, you can gain valuable insight into which livestock to sell and how to meet buyer requirements," he explains.

"By providing the auctioneer with as much information as possible prior to the sale, such as health status and genetics, this can all be added to the catalogue and enhance your chances of achieving the highest possible price for your stock.

"Of course, the simple reality is that well-presented and dressed sheep will provide added value in the sales ring. If you can also ensure consistency in the run of breeding sheep you are selling, you will be well positioned to obtain the best price."

Based on a slightly reduced entry on the year at the first breeding sheep sale of the season at Exeter in mid July, where more than 5,000 shearlings and ewes sold to a much stronger trade, averaging around £20 dearer, Mr Steer is optimistic about the season.

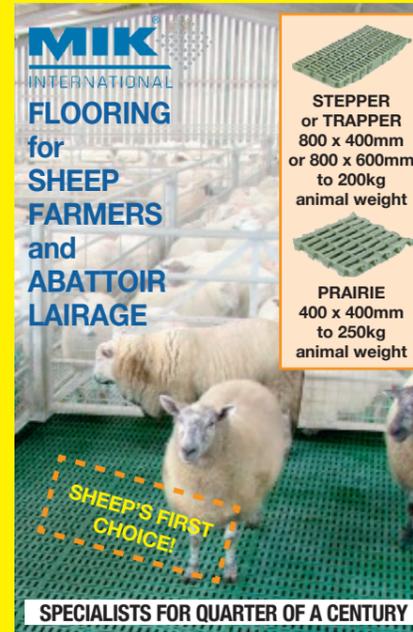
"There were a few less about, but a lot of good quality," he says. "We have now had a bit of rain, so buyers are looking for quality and decent numbers. You would like to think that sets us in good stead, and is a good barometer for the rest of the season."



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Investment is essential to buffer your business against future unknowns

By Andrew Suddes, Promar International

The current mood of UK sheep farmers can often be gauged by the prevailing lamb price, but while the 2023 season appears to have got off to a positive start there are other matters looming on the horizon starting to home into view.

These might include the slow goodbye to the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the onset of delinked payments from 2024, understanding the sustainability agenda and what it means for your farm, and how will the market evolve in the face of the ongoing cost of living crisis. All in all, it will lead farmers to wonder how their business will survive in a rapidly changing environment.

BPS reduction

The obvious short-term pressure will come from the reduction and phasing out of BPS. Farmers will experience the cold winter chill of a 35% year on year reduction when payments start arriving this year. This will be a wakeup call for both profits and cashflow – and you can start planning now by working out what cash you might need and speak to your bank if necessary.

The changes in payment regime offers opportunities as well as threats. While the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) in England more resembles a traditional agri-environment scheme than a subsidy, the Government has set out a clear agenda and direction of travel when it talks about public money for public goods and this scheme looks like it will represent the best and most secure source of income for farmers in the future. The same is likely to be true in the

devolved nations as they confirm their SFI equivalents.

The question for many businesses will be how far you want to go down the sustainability agenda but, in the first instance, there appears to be some low hanging fruit for many livestock farmers. This should include testing soils for organic matter, setting out a nutrient management plan and managing hedgerows on your farm. There may also be some more ambitious milestones around planting herbal leys, flower rich margins and taking land out of production.

Each of these should be considered in the context of your business direction, but there should be good income opportunities. Embracing SFI and its devolved equivalents will help to set your farm up as a store of carbon, which is likely to bring its own opportunities in future years.

Marketing

Making lamb competitive in a world where consumers are feeling worse off while also becoming more discerning around the quality and the sustainability credentials of the food they buy is a significant challenge. Marketing the product will bring its usual challenges, but there are opportunities for livestock farmers to maximise the environmental credential of their produce.

The role of sheep as efficient converters of the sun's energy into food for us all on more marginal areas is underplayed. Farmers who want to tighten up this process of feed conversion can focus on genetics and feed efficiency to maximise returns.

Genetic gain offers a real return on investment



Improving forage utilisation or grazing multi-species swards can improve the bottom line.

if you can increase the liveweight gain in your flock without increasing the inputs of feed. Experience in other sectors suggests sheep farmers have a lot to gain in this area.

Feed efficiency management may involve improving grassland management, animal environment or controlling infectious disease.

Investment will and should form part of any business plan for the medium term. Generating the cash to invest in the environment will be challenging but you should plan to invest to improve the feed efficiency factors mentioned above, or even to grow your business.

With recent interest rate rises in mind, the landscape looks harder than it has for some years. Careful planning is essential, but take time to talk to your bank or financial partners to understand their position on risk and lending requirements.

All in all, there are significant challenges for many livestock businesses as we move into this new world. But if you look carefully, there are also opportunities that, if executed well, can help to build resilience into your business and protect from the inevitable turbulence that awaits.

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Monitor Farm studies soils and drainage to improve grazing productivity



Soil pH, field drainage and implementing a new grass and grazing plan are the key focus at Lands of Drumhead, a QMS Monitor Farm at Gartness, Stirlingshire.

Farmed by Bruce and Shona Duncan, it is one of nine monitor farms across Scotland taking part in the programme run by QMS and AHDB, funded by Scottish Government. The programme helps farms reach full economic, social and environmental sustainability by optimising production.

Situated on the boundary of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, the farm supports 1,100 ewes and 165 suckler cows over 1,335 acres (540ha), with most progeny sold store. Three of Mr and Mrs Duncan's children are becoming increasingly involved in running the farm and diversified agri-tourism enterprises that include glamping pods and selling home-grown lamb, hogget and mutton direct from the farm.

of lime in the past has been constrained by the farm sitting on a very narrow back road that is a struggle for the bulk artics lorries making deliveries.

Christine Cuthbertson of QMS says: "On seeing the soil analysis results, the family has realised the importance of trying to get soil pH up and Mr Duncan has invested time into making a hard pad to provide a tipping area for bulk lime."



Fixing soil and drainage issues is a step to better productivity.

Monitoring

As part of the four-year monitor farm programme, other farmers and experts will be brought together to help the Duncans assess farm performance, explore opportunities and develop solutions to the challenges they face.

Soil sampling and analysis undertaken so far has highlighted the need for an active liming programme across Lands of Drumhead to improve soil pH to 5.8 on permanent pasture and 6.2 on temporary grass and re-seeds.

This will provide the greatest return on investment, according to soil specialists, but use

Rebecca Duncan, his daughter, adds: "Already we've put on quite a bit of lime. We've prioritised the silage ground because that's where our fertiliser use is the most, so that's the first obvious saving we can make to get more grass in those fields and hopefully reducing fertiliser input."

The importance of soil pH has been echoed by grazing specialist Graham Lofthouse, who has recommended a 10-year grassland plan for the farm, looking at pH in particular.

"Low pH is the principal limiting factor for grassland, locking up macro and micronutrients," Mr Lofthouse says. "Sward management is also important. Measure species composition to

understand sward quality and potential, and vary stocking rate of both sheep and cattle to manage grazing efficiency. The sward stick is a valuable tool – use it. Focus on keeping the grass as vegetative as possible, as the leaf is the powerhouse."

Fixing small drainage issues in the farm's heavy clay fields is another important step to better productivity, says Jamie Dick, a drainage specialist. "The farm's field drainage system is still operating but needs some maintenance where there are sook [sink] holes. I've recommended getting those small maintenance things done and making sure outlets are okay. After that, field by field soil management is key."

Drainage issues

The Duncans are considering the use of an aerator with blades able to penetrate and shatter the hard pan in soils without the risk of soil erosion, helping to improve rooting and nutrient uptake, as an option for areas suffering from drainage issues.

Besides the focus on soils and grassland, the family has also been discussing specialist plans on nutrient management and reseeding, sheep nutrition, and has already implemented a new strategy to tackle lameness in sheep.

Mrs Cuthbertson adds: "The activity by monitor farmers has risen since the launch in December. It's great to see the Duncans embracing change and advice from the plans and testing undertaken."

"The social part of the programme is vital, allowing local farmers to visit the Duncan family and share their concerns. It's always good to know you are not alone."

More information at www.monitorfarms.co.uk.

Learning from the 2022 drought for future grassland management

By Dr Liz Genever, independent sheep consultant

Summer 2022 was difficult for weaning and finishing lambs, as well as getting ewes in good condition for tupping and growing cover crops, as hikes in feed and fertiliser prices coincided with a prolonged dry spell that affected grass growth in many areas of the UK.

Hopefully we won't see drought conditions again in 2023 but with feed and fertiliser prices remaining high, there are things we can learn from last year for the future.

Cut-off point for lambs. For systems pushing down their supplementation levels (either grain or conserved feeds), it's important to prioritise winter feed for their ewes and get many of their lambs off the farm by early October, either as finished animals or as stores.

For farms that generally feed concentrates to lambs in the autumn, you could consider introducing it sooner in the season to try and get more away earlier. This would also take advantage of high feed conversion when the lambs are younger.

Contract finishing of lambs. There is an increasing number of farmers offering a contracting finishing service, where lambs are moved from their home farm to where they will be finished, with a transfer value agreed. When the lambs are sold, the difference between the transfer value and sale price is split between the lamb owner and the contract finisher. This is a solution if the breed of lamb would not do as well in a store lamb sale.

Quicker decisions during a dry spell. When asked what they would do differently during the dry spell of 2022, many producers said they should have started feeding additional supplement (hay or silage) earlier, and they would have fed lambs with creep sooner.

This would have helped to maintain covers for longer, with the idea being as grass growth slows down, the rotation slows down. Grass covers helped to protect moisture levels in the soil by providing shade. Farms that were practising tall grass grazing, which meant a high proportion of the farm being rested with high covers, were more resilient to the dry spell.

On many farms, there is a need to build up reserves of hay and silage during 2023. However, this needs to be done without affecting grass availability for stock on the farm.



Lack of autumn grass can affect pregnancy rates in ewes.

Artificial nitrogen as a sticking plaster. For farms where it is no longer cost effective to use a spring fertiliser application to help grass recover, winter covers need managing better. The aim should be for each field to have a three-month rest over the winter.

If nitrogen is applied at the right time (when grass is growing and soil temperatures are warm enough) to the right types of grasses to fields with good fertility, it can be cost-effective. However, all systems need to be

investigating alternatives such as red clover and lucerne and focus on their soil health.

Nitrogen will be supplied to grass from clovers and other legumes, animal returns (dung and urine), muck and slurry. There are also bacteria in the soil, not just in the nodules of legumes, that will fix nitrogen from the air and make it available in the soil. This works better when there are good fungi levels in the soil.



Diverse swards offer multiple benefits for sheep and soil.

More diversity for winter cropping. The challenges for cover crops in winter 2022/23 suggests we need to ensure we drill or access a range of cover crops to spread the risk of poor establishment and the impact of the weather. There are also options around deferred grazing or bale grazing that could be explored for ewes.



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

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Are you safeguarding your valuables against unwanted intruders?

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



Few people would deny the health status of a flock is a key factor in its profitability and as such is extremely precious – so why don't we do more to protect it?

If you were guarding a valuable treasure, you would probably keep it in a fortress with sturdy walls, strong gates and vigilant guards. If your fortress was approached by unknown people, you wouldn't just let them in, you would stop them and carry out checks to make sure they were not a threat to your treasure, not think about it once they were inside the walls.

Yet that is exactly what many sheep farmers do every autumn when they bring in replacement sheep. Survey after survey highlights the lack of biosecurity we operate for our flocks. For example, an Elanco Animal Health survey found only 5% of sheep farmers thought quarantine had any role in safeguarding themselves against importing resistant parasites. This costs the industry millions, not to mention the hassle and stress, all of which can be avoided with a little planning.

Threats

It doesn't matter that the sheep you just bought look really well, or that they were the top priced pen or even from a known source, they still carry the potential to wreak havoc. The list of potential threats is long, including sheep scab, lice, resistant roundworms and/or liver fluke, *Haemonchus contortus* (the barber's pole worm) not to mention contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), footrot and orf. Most of these

you cannot see and some, such as CODD or sheep scab, can take some time to show themselves. The only way to protect your flock is to put a safeguarding policy in place.

For sheep farmers our fortress is our fences, our guards are testing and appropriate treatments, and our strong gates are the steps we take to isolate any new sheep to make sure they are not bringing in any threats.



Key to the whole process is making sure incomers go into an isolation period (quarantine) just as you would imagine medieval newcomers camping outside the fortress walls until they were deemed safe. In modern parlance, it's like hitting the pause button online when playing a video game, so you can isolate yourself from a dangerous enemy until you have had time to assess the threat and find a way to neutralise it.

Of course, an effective policy requires some time and costs money, but this is nothing compared to the cost of importing one or more of these diseases. Sheep scab can take up to six months to show its hand, by which time the

majority of the breeding ewes in a flock will be affected, along with young lambs. This is a very unpleasant experience, difficult to deal with and devastating for the flock.

Protection

Effective protection from the risk posed by incoming sheep takes planning and may mean, for example, you need to consider buying rams earlier than you have in the past.

- 1. Press the pause button.** Isolate (quarantine) all incoming sheep (ewe, rams and lambs) from the resident flock. Yard them for the first 24-48 hours so you can carry out treatments (see below). Keep them isolated from the resident flock for as long as possible (three weeks as the absolute minimum, preferably longer). Carry out tests and observe carefully for any signs of other issues such as footrot, CODD, orf etc.
- 2. Treat sheep against the unseen threats from parasites while they are yarded.** This includes resistant worms and liver fluke if required.
- 3. Plan the turnout area when they leave the yards.** Make sure they are turned out to an appropriate grazing area after and/or between treatments for the remainder of their isolation. This must be isolated from the rest of the flock, have carried sheep this grazing season so any worms surviving treatment are diluted, and not be a liver fluke risk area.

More detailed information on testing and treatments at www.scops.org.uk/internal-parasites/quarantine-advice-for-internal-and-external-parasites.

Fields for turnout are also important when planning how to manage new stock.




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Understanding the history of bought-in sheep helps reduce disease risk.



Quarantine is essential for all incoming stock.



Effective quarantine is about pre and post-purchase decisions

vetPartners

Open and frank discussions with vendors before buying in new sheep will allow buyers to have a better understanding of the stock and their previous environment and, therefore, better manage them once purchased.

That is the message from Dawn Bezuidenhout of Clevedale Vets, North Yorkshire, with regards to the potential of bought-in sheep to bring new disease and health challenges to your existing flock.

"It's very well publicised and recommended that everyone should have a checklist of what they should inject or treat new sheep with on arrival on their farms," says Mrs Bezuidenhout. "However, putting more thought into your pre-purchase decisions will also have an impact on flock health and keeping out diseases."

Disease

She says disease challenges that can be introduced to your flock by bought-in sheep include resistant worms, liver fluke, sheep scab, contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) and contagious abortion.

"Iceberg diseases are also a concern," adds Mrs Bezuidenhout. "These are diseases where what you see on the surface is just the tip of the iceberg and there's usually a huge amount of subclinical disease present under the surface."

The four main iceberg diseases of concern are ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA), maedi visna, Johne's disease and caseous lymphadenitis.



CODD is a highly contagious disease you don't want to bring into the flock.

Prior to making any purchases – either privately or through an auction mart – Mrs Bezuidenhout recommends having a discussion with the vendor to find out key information about the sheep they are selling. "You should look to have a conversation with the farmer selling the sheep because knowledge is power," she says.

"It is useful to know if the vendor is the breeder of all the sheep in the pen. For example, a pen of Mules might not be from the one breeder and it's not preferable if the pen is from three or

four different farms of origin, as that is multiple different health statuses to consider."

She says understanding whether the sheep have come from an area with ticks is important, because sheep that are naïve to ticks are likely to face problems if introduced to an area where ticks are a problem.

"If you are in an area with ticks, don't be put off by sheep from an area without ticks," adds Mrs Bezuidenhout. "Just take steps to acclimatise the sheep to the ticks before they become pregnant; this is something that can be planned in conjunction with your vet."

Liver fluke

Likewise, she says introducing sheep from an area prone to liver fluke isn't a reason not to buy them, but instead something to be mindful of.

"If sheep are coming from an area with a lot of fluke, you should treat them as if they might have resistant fluke once they arrive on your farm," she explains. "Treat them first with triclabendazole, to kill immature fluke, and then put them on dry pasture, before treating them again, at least six to eight weeks later, with a flukicide that kills adult fluke."

Lastly, Mrs Bezuidenhout recommends asking the vendor if they carry out regular post mortem investigations on fallen stock, as these are often a good way to find out if the flock has a problem with iceberg diseases.

"If you are buying sheep from a farm that

regularly post mortems fallen stock and they have never had a case of OPA diagnosed, for example, you can be fairly confident that the farm is not heavily affected by OPA," she adds. "The more people who ask about post mortems, the more normal carrying them out will become. It is a hugely useful tool to monitor flock health."

Questions for the vendor are not restricted to pre-purchase discussions and Mrs Bezuidenhout recommends finding out about the farm's vaccination strategy for chlamydia and footrot once the sheep have been purchased.

Vaccines

"If the sheep have come from a farm that doesn't vaccinate for chlamydia abortion, I'd strongly advise farmers to lamb those sheep in a separate group from the rest of the flock for the first year," says Mrs Bezuidenhout. "This will reduce the risk of chlamydia spreading to the rest of the flock."

She says it is also important to ask whether incoming sheep have received a vaccine to prevent footrot. "This is important to know because one of the quarantine treatments that people tend to use is cydectin 1% and sheep that have had the vaccine for footrot should never receive this," adds Mrs Bezuidenhout.

Once you are confident you have enough information from the vendor, and the sheep have

been purchased, Mrs Bezuidenhout recommends the following quarantine tips once the new sheep reach your farm:

- Worm incoming sheep with two different classes of wormer, of which one should be an orange (group 4-AD) or purple (group 5-SI) product. Keep these sheep in a yard or housing for the next 48 hours so any resistant worm eggs they shed while the treatment is working do not contaminate your pasture.
- Footbath all incoming sheep with your regular footbath product once they come off the trailer.
- Either test for sheep scab antibodies or, if the risk is high, treat for the disease when you are worming incoming sheep.
- Complete a liver fluke risk assessment and treat incoming sheep with a triclabendazole product where appropriate.
- After treatments, keep new sheep isolated from the rest of the flock for 28 days, or as long as possible, on pasture which has been grazed by sheep recently, and monitor them regularly during this time for lameness and signs of ill health.

For more information, and treatment advice, Mrs Bezuidenhout recommends speaking to your vet.

Key questions to ask sheep vendors

- Who has bred the sheep?
- Have they come from an area where ticks are present?
- Have they come from an area with a high prevalence of liver fluke?
- Have they come from a farm where regular post mortems are carried out?



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Don't leave it too late to ensure your rams are ready for tuppung

By Nerys Wright, AHDB 

Checking rams before tuppung sounds basic and is nothing new – yet AHDB and Sheep Veterinary Society survey work shows rams assumed to be 'good to go' on appearance were in fact hiding at least one problem that could impact fertility.

There are some key things to consider to ensure rams work to their full potential, particularly when buying new rams.

- Where do you want to buy your rams from?
- What's your selection criteria? – breed/breeder, ram age, health status etc.
- When can you buy them and does this fit in with your system?
- What EBVs are you looking for?

Carefully examine new and existing rams at least 10 weeks before tuppung. This leaves plenty of time to buy and isolate new rams before they need to go out with the ewes. It also enables treatments to be administered prior to working.

The sperm maturation process, from initial production to use, takes 49 days (seven weeks). This is why so much emphasis is placed on making sure rams are fit and fertile at least 10 weeks before the tuppung season, much earlier than when they are turned out with the ewes.

Quarantine incoming rams for a minimum of 21 days before mixing with other sheep on your farm. Consider treatments and vaccinations for the following:

- Internal and external parasites – follow SCOPS recommendations.
- Clostridial diseases – annual booster for current rams. If vaccination status of

The five Ts. Things to check before purchasing a new ram and for all rams before they start work.

Teeth	Check for under or overshot teeth, missing teeth and/or molar abscesses. These will affect the ram's ability to eat sufficient food and potentially impact body condition.
Testicles	Scrotal circumference should be a minimum 36cm for mature rams and 34cm for ram lambs. The testicles should feel like a human's flexed bicep, with no lumps or bumps present. Testicle tapes can be requested from AHDB.
Toes	Check locomotion, posture and for signs of arthritis. Inspect all feet for infection and excessive horn growth. Only trim if overgrowth is affecting posture.
Tone	Aim for BCS 3.5–4.0. Rams can lose up to 15% of their bodyweight, or up to one unit of BCS during the mating period.
Treat	Ensure routine vaccinations or treatments are administered at least eight weeks before the mating season to ensure they don't affect sperm production.

purchased rams is unknown, two vaccines four to six weeks apart and an annual booster thereafter.

- Lameness – inspect for signs of footrot, contagious ovine digital dermatitis or previous evidence of lameness, such as blue spray or scaring. Routine foot trimming is no longer recommended.

Synchronising

Exposing ewes to the sight, sound and/or smell of a mature male ram can synchronise ewes, resulting in a more compact lambing period. This can be done by housing or grazing rams near to ewes (make sure fencing is secure to avoid any early lambs).

Another option is to run one vasectomised (teaser) ram with 100 ewes for 17 days, remove and immediately replace with entire rams. Ensure a minimum of 10 weeks has passed from when the ram was vasectomised before running with any ewes, or you might have some unexpected lambs.

The ewe-to-ram ratio will vary depending on many factors – breed, maturity, terrain, to name a few. The most commonly cited ratio is one ram to 40 ewes but many farmers report 1:60 or higher. Fit and fertile rams are essential if ratios are higher and/or single sire mating. You may need to increase ram power to ensure all ewes are covered if they are synchronised (chemically or with a teaser).

Raddles, paints and harnesses are tools available to help assess how tuppung is going. For example, different colours for particular rams or knowing how many ewes have been covered within a specific time to help with feeding in late pregnancy. Ensure harnesses fit well and are adjusted as the ram loses condition during tuppung.



The best guide to a ram's genetic merit is provided through EBVs. Animal performance data is collected by ram breeders and analysed to calculate how much of each animal's performance is due to its breeding merit.

EBVs are not just for pedigree breeders, commercial ram buyers are now looking deeper into an animal's background before purchase, rather than buying on looks alone.

Ram Compare, the UK's national progeny test, uses nominated performance-recorded rams from various terminal sire breeds on commercial farms across the UK. Data is collected from birth to slaughter from lambs reared in a commercial environment.

Using this dataset, new estimated EBVs have been developed for carcase traits such as carcase weight, conformation, fat class and days to slaughter, with a lamb value sub-index indicating the overall profitability of each ram.

Visit the AHDB knowledge library for more detail at www.ahdb.org.uk, and read about SCOPS quarantine recommendations on page 36.



Breeding progress can be monitored through paints and raddles.

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Understanding the basics can help keep worms under control

Gastro-intestinal nematodes, more commonly referred to as worms, are a major cause of lost production, disease and even death in sheep flocks – and getting your head round the basics can aid success in tackling them.

All of the major internal worm species affecting sheep in the UK have the same basic lifecycle. The adults live within the gut of the sheep, anywhere from the abomasum (fourth stomach) to the large intestine, depending on the species.

Lifecycle

The females lay eggs that are passed in the faeces. These develop into larvae in the faeces passing through L1 and L2 stages. How rapidly this occurs is dependent on temperature, occurring faster at higher temperatures.

Once the larvae reach the L3 stage they are infectious and move out of the faeces and on to the grass by swimming in the water film (hence in very dry conditions the worms are trapped in the faeces). The L3 migrate up the grass stems, with the highest concentration on the bottoms of the stems, with lower numbers the higher up the grass you go.

The L3 are ingested by the grazing sheep. They then progress through L4 and L5 stages that can cause disease, just like adults can, before becoming adults.

The L3 have a limited supply of energy and they use this up faster in warmer weather than in colder. Consequently, in the usual British climate, for example no prolonged periods above 30°C or below 0°C, pastures become contaminated faster in summer than winter, but also L3 levels decline faster in summer than winter. Unfortunately, the development time ranges from one week to a few months, whereas the time for the L3 levels to decline by 90% will range from a few months to the better part of a year.

Most worm species cause disease through disruption of digestion and causing the lining of the gut to become leaky, allowing nutrients and fluid to be lost. Consequently, signs of infection include decreased growth rate, poor quality coat, weight loss, diarrhoea, dehydration, loss of protein, weak bones, weakness, collapse and eventually death.

Haemonchus

The worm *Haemonchus contortus* (the barber's pole worm) is an important exception. It lives in the abomasum (fourth stomach) and sucks blood from the stomach lining. It does not cause diarrhoea so signs of infection are related instead to the blood loss - decreased growth rate, weight loss, anaemia, pale mucous membranes, blood protein loss leading to submandibular oedema (bottle jaw), weakness, collapse and death.

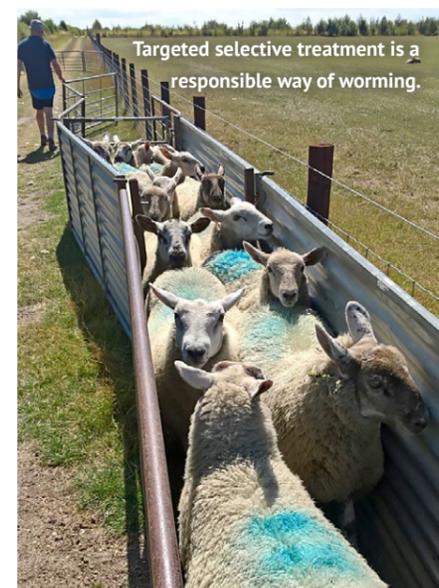
Sheep develop an immune response to the worm species they are infected by, but this takes time, so lambs are the most susceptible. Adult

By James Crilly, ECSRH



sheep usually have very low levels of worm infestation, due to their immune status, but rams remain more susceptible than ewes and immunity in ewes can fall in very late pregnancy and early lactation. There is also some variation between breeds and between individuals.

As well as genetic factors, nutritional factors will affect how able a sheep is to cope with worm challenge. Sheep in good body condition, on the correct plane of nutrition, with no trace element deficiencies, will be less badly affected than animals lacking in any of these.



Targeted selective treatment is a responsible way of worming.

One of the most commonly used methods of detecting infection is the faecal worm egg count (FEC). This is a method of establishing the concentration of worm eggs per gram of faeces, which in turn reflects the number of adult female worms in the gut.

Although it is not perfect (for instance, it will not detect large numbers of L4 and L5 larvae, the worm egg output varies from species to species and very loose faeces will result in an underestimated count) it is an extremely useful tool.

FECs

FECs are performed by specialist labs and in-house by many vet practices, with some offering specialist staining options to specifically detect haemonchus. Training is available to allow sheep keepers to perform their own worm egg counts, and the equipment required need not be expensive.

Other methods of determining need for treatment include regular weighing of lambs, such that decreases in growth rate (which is often due to increasing worm challenge, but may be due to other causes) are detected. This is the basis of the TST (targeted selective treatment) approach, whereby only the lambs that are growing poorly are treated.



Pasture risk assessment is an important part of worm control.

A system of scoring the colour of the conjunctivae (inside of the eyelid) called FAMACHA has been developed as a way of scoring the degree of anaemia and so the level of impact haemonchus infection is having. It thus allows for targeted treatment of individuals who need it, rather than the group as a whole. As with using growth rate to monitor worm exposure, it is not a specific

tool – sheep may be pale for reasons other than haemonchus infection – but it can be a useful part of control once haemonchosis has been diagnosed.

A good relationship with your vet can be very helpful in regards to worm control (and indeed control of many other diseases). [More on haemonchus on page 44. Visit www.scops.org.uk and www.nadis.org.uk for more advice.](http://www.scops.org.uk)



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Tuesday 12 th September	2 nd Sale of SHEARLING GIMMERS & Sale of all classes of BREEDING SHEEP + CHAROLLAIS RAMS
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Monday 9 th October	Special Evening sale of 120 SWALEDALE RAMS
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Tuesday 17 th October	23 rd Annual Sale of 100 DALESBRED RAMS & FEMALES Sale of HILL RAMS inc 2 nd Sale of BFL Rams

Farmers warned to keep a look out for haemonchus this summer

By Jasmine Smith, APHA



With climatic conditions changing, APHA is encouraging raised awareness of the haemonchus parasite, which could appear in areas not previously considered at risk.

Last summer's drought provided optimal conditions for what has been a lesser-known parasite, *Haemonchus contortus*. Also known as the barber's pole worm due to its distinctive red and white spiral appearance, this roundworm is found in the abomasum of sheep, goats and alpacas.

It is a voracious blood sucker and uses its sharp mouth parts to pierce the stomach lining, ingest blood and cause severe anaemia. This worm is of particular concern due to its ability to cause significant production losses and develop resistance to anthelmintics. Resistance to orange (4-AD) wormers had been detected overseas, but only resistance to white (1-BZ) products has been documented in the UK.

Disease most commonly occurs in August and September but cases of the disease were detected earlier in 2022, prompting enhanced APHA surveillance (see panel).

The overall lifecycle is like other roundworms, with stages inside the host and on pasture. The free-living stages require warm weather for survival, hence haemonchus being a significant problem in tropical and subtropical countries and, historically, most prevalent in the south of England.

Distribution

The cooler climate in the north of the UK had limited the ability of haemonchus to reach significant numbers, but this appears to be changing, with the overall incidence of disease increasing and cases being frequently reported in the north of England and Scotland. Surveillance as far back as 2012 found the parasite on approximately 50% of farms, including the north of England and Scotland.

The adult female worms produce a huge number of eggs (10-15,000/day) in a relatively short period of time (14-15 days). It was previously thought it could not survive the UK winter, but several studies have disproved this, showing it undergoes hypobiosis during the winter to survive and resumes activity the following spring/summer.

In Australia it has given up on hypobiosis altogether, in an attempt to avoid being killed at

this stage of its lifecycle.

The most reported clinical signs associated with haemonchosis are wasting and finding animals dead. Unlike other worms, it does not cause diarrhoea. Infections may be acute if many larvae are ingested in a short period resulting in severe anaemia and death.

Chronic forms of the disease arise when small numbers of larvae are ingested over a longer period and clinical signs include wasting, lethargy and bottle jaw, which may be mistaken for chronic fluke.

Diagnosis is achieved through a combination of clinical signs, FECs and post mortem examination. A FEC result of thousands of eggs per gram may raise suspicions haemonchus is present, but because haemonchus eggs look the same as other worms, a technique known as peanut agglutinin (PNA) staining is required to identify them.

Prevention

Despite being widespread, there are farms where disease-free status exists and can be maintained by quarantining new arrivals in line with SCOPS guidelines. Not only will this reduce the risk of introducing haemonchus, it will also reduce the risk of introducing other worms and resistance. This may seem arduous and costly but, once introduced, haemonchus cannot be eradicated.

A comprehensive plan should be developed with your vet if haemonchus is known to be present on your farm. Haemonchus is extremely adept at developing resistance to anthelmintics, so it is essential animals are only treated when necessary and a susceptible population of haemonchus worms are maintained in refugia. As is true of control of many other gastrointestinal nematodes, regular FECs should be carried out to determine if treatment is required.

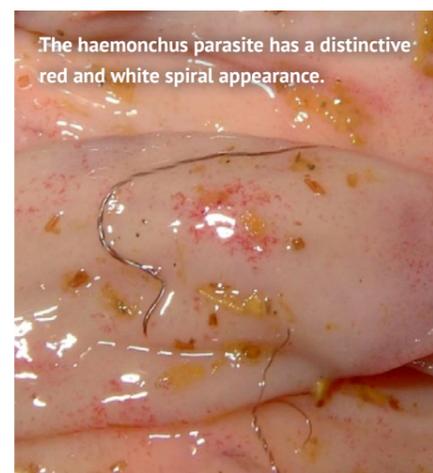
If haemonchus is suspected, a PNA stain should be performed to enable informed treatment choices and map the farm, identifying high risk pastures and allowing implementation of avoidance strategies. Ask your vet or adviser about staining, as APHA is offering it at a reduced price this summer.

Treatment choices will depend on the severity of disease and the species contributing to the parasite burden. Chronic infections allow targeted treatment of those affected by monitoring BCS and using the FAMACHA system to monitor anaemia. Acute infection presents more of a challenge as there is no efficient way

to determine which animals are carrying a high burden. If the parasite burden consists mainly of haemonchus worms, narrow spectrum wormers can be used.

There is a vaccine against haemonchus and although it is not currently licensed in the UK, it is being used successfully in Australia and South Africa and is an important tool for the long-term sustainable control of this parasite.

The haemonchus vaccine was discussed at the NSA/Moredun webinar in June. Watch online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.



The haemonchus parasite has a distinctive red and white spiral appearance.

APHA enhanced surveillance findings

- 81% of 342 samples tested positive for the presence of haemonchus.
- The highest FEC was 859,000egg, which demonstrates the high biotic potential of this parasite.
- Most positive samples were mixed infections containing significant numbers of eggs from other gastrointestinal worms.
- Haemonchus is widespread, with positive samples originating from many counties.
- Sheep can acquire immunity to haemonchus, but the sporadic nature of the parasite means you cannot assume adult sheep will be immune in the way they are to many other worms, as there can be long periods without exposure, rendering them naïve.

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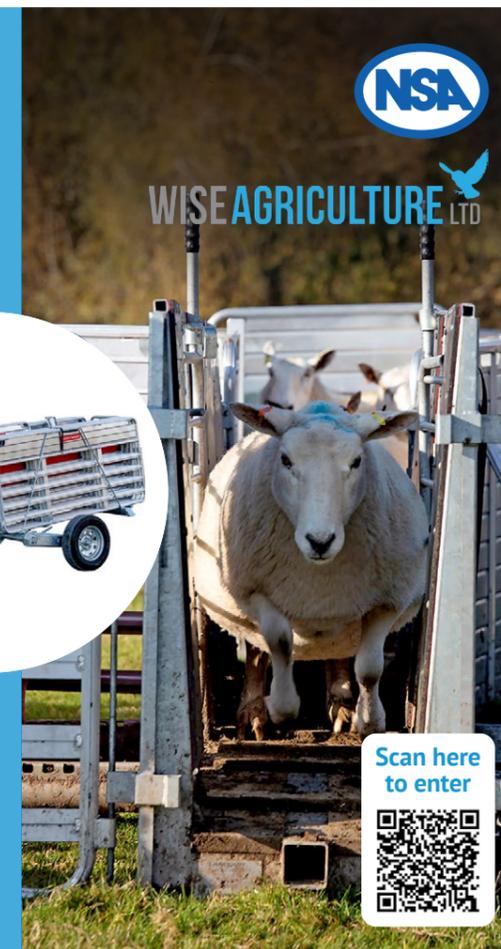
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Collaborative project confirms core vaccination benefits to flock health

A 24-month collaborative 'Core Vaccination' project – organised by NSA and MSD Animal Health – has demonstrated the benefits of a consistent vaccination programme.

The initiative followed National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) livestock vaccination guidelines and looked at lameness, infectious abortion, clostridial diseases and pasteurellosis as disease management priorities.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "The economic and welfare impact of these threats to UK sheep production are such that disease prevention is significantly preferable to treatment. What's more, vaccines are a key component in improving the health and welfare of sheep flocks across the nation.

"Correct usage increases productivity and promotes the wider one health agenda to reduce our industry's reliance on antibiotic treatments and ultimately lower farm carbon footprints, while producing food and other public goods."

NSA Ambassadors

Implemented on the farms of four NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, the project demonstrated the benefits of consistent implementation of the five-point plan for the reduction of sheep lameness. There was a reduction in lameness prevalence of 66% across the group managing 2,500 ewes, with each participating flock reducing their lameness prevalence by at least half over the two-year period.

Hannah Donegan of MSD comments: "At the start of the project in 2020, the combined lameness prevalence figure across all four farms was 6.6%. By the end of the project average lameness prevalence had been reduced to 2.2%.

"The five-point lameness reduction plan gives

a clear strategy for managing any foot problems. Implemented correctly over the longer term, it builds natural disease resilience within a flock, reduces the disease challenge and spread on farm, and improves flock immunity through vaccination.

"It involves treating affected animals promptly, culling persistent offenders, avoiding the propagation of infection when sheep are gathered together, quarantining any bought-in stock and routine whole flock vaccination against footrot, the most common infectious disease implicated in sheep lameness."



Routine foot trimming is not recommended.

At the start of the project, the participating farms undertook a lameness control assessment by a trained adviser. This demonstrated all four were only implementing parts of the five-point plan.

"Vaccination scored lowest and farms were focusing their effort on trying to avoid infection being spread at gathering and handling," says Ms Donegan.

The farms were all encouraged to implement the five-point plan more thoroughly and had made significant progress by the end of the 24 months.

"Rigorous implementation of the five-point plan led to the significant lameness prevalence improvement," says Ms Donegan. "All the farms implemented a stricter policy when it came to lameness being a reason to cull, with repeat

offenders and misshapen feet being unacceptable."

As a result of the stricter protocols all participating farms noted the severity of lameness cases also reduced, as well as use of footbathing and antibiotics.

"The results obtained showed there was a 30% reduction in moderately lame animals and a 50% reduction in severely lame animals, as measured by Liverpool University's four-point locomotion score," says Ms Donegan.

"Footbathing was reduced by up to half on some farms. Antibiotic usage fell by 33%, on average across the four farms, compared with their 2020 baseline, simply because there weren't as many lame animals to treat. This fall in usage and number of treatments is also explained by the implementation of rigorous culling policies. Best practice guidelines suggest if a sheep presents twice for lameness treatment, it should be culled."

Cost savings

Ms Donegan calculates a cost saving of £6,125 across the four farms as a result of implementing the five-point plan more fully and keeping lameness levels at 2% or less.

"Extrapolating over a five-year period – and taking into account the cost of vaccination against footrot – there is a potential saving of more than £5 per ewe per year. This doesn't consider any saving on labour costs as a result of less time spent dealing with lame sheep or footbathing," she says.

Ms Donegan concludes that the project highlights the importance of committing fully to the five-point plan.

"You're in it for the long haul and rigorous implementation of all five points is the key. If one element is dropped, this reduces your safety margin and may impact adversely on your overall control of lameness. Stick with it and be fully aware when your high-risk periods are so timely and relevant action can be taken" she says.

Whole flock vaccination a 'game-changer' for tackling lameness

As a strong advocate of employing vaccination to control sheep diseases, continuous improvement is how NSA Next Generation Ambassador Ernie Richards describes progress with managing sheep lameness.

"I've always been a believer in disease prevention over treatment and we routinely vaccinate ewes against infectious abortion, clostridial diseases and pasteurellosis. We've also tried vaccination for footrot lameness in the past," he says.

For the last eight years, Mr Richards has managed 1,000 purebred Lleyns as a closed flock for Stuart and Helen Morris near Hay-on-Wye, Powys.

The flock lambs in two 500-ewe batches, one in March and one in April, with 250 ewe replacements retained each year and other females selected to sell as ewe lambs or shearlings at the autumn breeding sales. Prime lambs are sold deadweight.

"When I started working for Mr Morris in 2015, he'd be the first to admit lameness

was an issue in the ewes. Since implementing all areas of the five-point plan we've seen a noticeable improvement and there's barely a lame sheep on the farm," says Mr Richards, boasting a 70% fall in lameness prevalence (from 5.65% to 1.71%) between 2020 and 2022.

Advice

"Moving to whole flock vaccination has been the real game-changer.

Instead of just vaccinating the ewes as we were doing, we also vaccinated our replacements, ewe lambs and tups. My advice now is not to compromise.

"Our high-risk period is always heading into the later winter months and housing for lambing. We did see a spike in lameness in December 2021 following a period of extreme weather when sheep were congregating around feed stations at pasture."

During the 24-month project, Mr Richards



Locomotion scoring is one way to assess lameness.

has also seen a progressive drop in the number of antibiotic treatments administered to lame sheep.

"Looking at our 2020 baseline, we saw a 23% reduction in treatments during 2021 and a 28% reduction in 2022," he says. "Less time spent having to catch and treat lame animals is enough to justify the cost of the vaccine alone, even before you consider all the sheep now look healthier and are in better condition because they are not in pain."

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NSA-supported research highlights role of herbal leys for lamb production

Recently concluded research has positively assessed how herbal leys in arable rotations affect soil quality, crop productivity, emissions and livestock production and health, reports Emily Cooledge of Bangor University.

The 'Restoring soil quality through reintegration of leys and sheep into arable rotations' trial, for which NSA offered stakeholder support, had to be changed due to covid-19 restrictions – but still managed to conclude early this year.

"We know increasing the herb and legume content of pasture has the potential to reduce the environmental impacts of grazing lambs, while improving productivity and reducing on-farm costs," says Miss Cooledge.

"Herbal leys (also known as multispecies swards) offer a low nitrogen input alternative to conventional pastures that can potentially reduce production costs and deliver greater ecosystem services, such as improved soil quality, increased sward productivity and quality, greater drought tolerance, and reduced nitrous oxide emissions. This is why they are rapidly increasing in popularity through agri-environment schemes.

"Key legume and herb species frequently selected in herbal ley mixtures, such as chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) and ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), often contain high levels of plant secondary metabolites that may reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing nitrogen lost via excreta, reducing the gastrointestinal

parasite burden, and improving livestock productivity. However, when combined as part of a commercial herbal ley mixture, little is known about their impact on lowland sheep production – hence the importance of this research."

Bangor University conducted a five-acre (2ha) split-field experiment where a commercial herbal ley and a grass-clover ley was rotationally grazed by Welsh Mountain lambs (3.2 LU/ha) in autumn 2020 (males, approximately six months old) and spring 2021 (females under 12 months old).

Measurements

Fresh forage samples were collected at the start of each grazing season, alongside regular sward height, soil chemistry, emissions from sward-specific urine and dung, faecal egg count and liveweight gain measurements. In spring 2021, blood samples were collected from ewe lambs after 11 weeks of grazing. A lab-scale experiment was used to determine ammonia volatilisation from sward-specific urine.

Miss Cooledge reports that key findings were made in several areas.

Sward quality and productivity

- No difference in general sward nutritional quality (e.g. crude protein, sugar) between the leys in either season.
- Higher sward macro (sodium, calcium, magnesium) and micronutrient (copper, cobalt, iodine, selenium) content in the herbal ley than the grass-clover ley in both seasons.
- No difference in sward productivity under rotational grazing.



Grazing herbal ley increased liveweight gain by 15% compared to grass-clover grazed.

Lamb productivity

- Liveweight gain was 15% greater in spring lambs grazing the herbal ley (172g/day) than the grass-clover ley (144g/day).
- Spring FEC scores were 78% lower in the herbal ley grazed lambs than the grass-clover leys, suggesting the herbal ley had a natural anthelmintic effect after 11 weeks of grazing.
- Spring lambs grazing the herbal ley had elevated plasma cobalt and selenium, lowering their risk of micronutrient deficiency.
- No difference in autumn lamb liveweight gain or FEC scores.

Soil quality and emissions

- Ammonia emissions were reduced by 140% in the herbal ley following the addition of sward-specific urine.
- Sward type had no effect on soil chemistry or nitrous oxide emissions from sward-specific urine or dung.
- Nitrogen excreta concentration was not affected by sward type.

"Increasing the herb and legume content of grazed grasslands demonstrated the potential to improve productivity and reduce on-farm production costs, while reducing environmental impacts," says Miss Cooledge. "However, herbal leys require careful grazing management to maintain productivity and deliver livestock benefits.

"Further refinements of commercial seed mixtures are needed to identify the optimum proportions of key plant species required in the sward composition to deliver environmental benefits prior to wide-scale on-farm adoption."

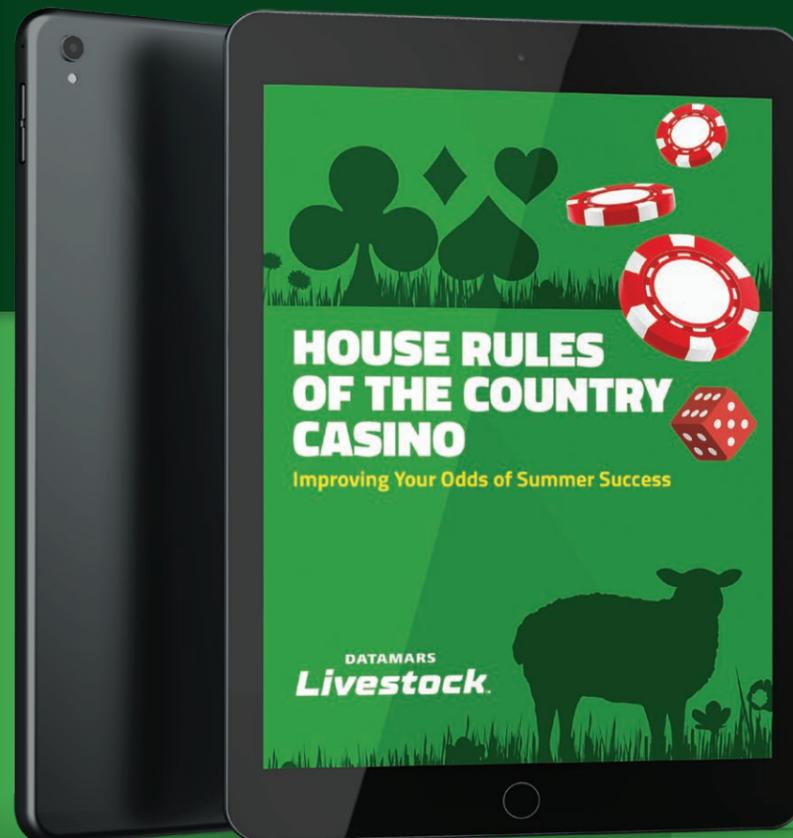
More information at restoringsoilquality.bangor.ac.uk.



Sheep were rotationally grazed around herbal or grass-clover plots.

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Industry support needed for louping ill vaccine trial to become on-farm reality



Things are looking hopeful for a new vaccine to protect sheep against louping ill – welcome news with the previous vaccine no longer available and the number of flocks affected by ticks on the rise.

Although louping ill can affect cattle, goats, horses, dogs, pigs, some camelids and humans, the tick-transmitted viral disease is primarily of concern for sheep and red grouse. Therefore MoreDun and the Game & Wildlife Trust have been working jointly on vaccination and challenge trials, kindly funded by grouse moor owners.

Trials

Beth Wells of MoreDun reports the trials for the new generation louping ill virus vaccine are complete and offer promising results. She says: "The results confirmed the vaccine raised a very strong immune response (antibodies against louping ill) in the vaccinated sheep, protected them when challenged (no clinical signs recorded) and the pathology results confirmed the virus did not enter the brain.

"So the very good news is there is a prototype vaccine showing efficacy that can go forward to further development and commercialisation."

MoreDun says numerous potential vaccine

manufacturers have been approached but there are huge potential barriers. Sales figures of previous louping ill virus vaccines are low and regulatory requirements make the cost of bringing a vaccine to market costly.



MoreDun has approached the Veterinary Medicines Directive (VMD) to establish limited marketing authorisation, which replaces the former EU Minor Use Minor Species regulations and should be a quicker, simpler and cheaper option to obtain regulatory approval. VMD has asked MoreDun to create a dossier for consideration, which needs support letters to increase impact.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "NSA, alongside other industry groups, has already provided support letters, but the more evidence we can collate to demonstrate the need and urgency for this vaccine, the higher chance of success. I urge any NSA members who are also part of farming groups, industries, associations and/or moorland groups to send a support letter to MoreDun."

Dr Wells continues: "The process for registration remains unclear, which is likely to lead to delays in the further development and commercialisation of the vaccine. But MoreDun fully understands the urgent need for this vaccine and, despite the commercialisation challenges, is fully committed."

Email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk to request a template support letter. And don't miss the NSA/MoreDun tick control webinar – details on page 2.

Statement of clarification

The last edition of *Sheep Farmer* carried an article titled 'Climate change and bracken growth tied to rise in ticks and tick-borne diseases'. NSA would like to confirm louping ill virus was already present in the UK but is now spreading to new areas, rather than being a novel disease to the UK.

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Following the flock

Catching up with NSA officeholders in Angus and Cumbria.

Peter Myles

NSA Scottish Region Chair, Angus



For the first time in nearly 50 years, I'll have not clipped a sheep this summer.

I've never been much of a shearer, but the work had to be done. I learned a technique using both hands from an old shepherd, which I was fiercely proud to continue. He would say, 'as long as you make them white, in a clean, tidy and timely manner laddie, it doesn't matter how you clip them.'

Despite several shearing courses showing the right way to do it I have stubbornly stuck to my guns.

I remember my first big shearing days; the communal enamel mug passed around for a gulp of beer and groups of neighbouring shearers, local keepers and shepherds. That slowly dwindled till latterly, with the help of a teenager or two, I clipped the hill ewes by myself.

Now, professional shearers in gangs come round with fancy clipping trailers and clip the lot in nearly a day and instead of the 'traic' is the loud beat of background music to keep them going.

My last ever day's clipping last year was the dreaded tups. Putting horns in painful places, a foot in your ear, lifting you up, with only a handpiece to hold for balance - then you know you're in trouble! However, I made them white, and that was good enough for me!



Peter reminisces over the tiring days of shearing.



Viv was proud to be part of the NSA North Sheep organising team.

Viv Lewis

NSA Northern Region Chair, Cumbria



I was thrilled to be part of NSA North Sheep at the start of the summer.

The event showcased the best of sheep farming in the North of England and increasingly our role in restoring nature and tackling the climate crisis. Thanks must go to the many farming families and friends freely giving their time to support, demonstrating the farming community spirit is alive and well.

Like all people involved in running an event, on the day I was too busy to see a lot. At the last minute we heard that Janet Hughes, Director for Defra's Future Farming and Countryside Programme, was to attend.

I was determined she talked to young sheep farmers as it's their futures at stake if Defra doesn't get it right. I gathered a group from upland and hill sheep breeds, most of whom had never heard of her, but after a brief introduction I left them to it.

I caught up with some of the group later on and they felt they had been listened to. This was typically tempered with a dollop of healthy scepticism, coupled with the wisdom of youth - actions speak louder than words.

Eddie Eastham

NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee Chair, Cumbria



Whatever progress we make in other ways, our farming lives are very much controlled by the weather.

This spring we have seen the usual extremes, with a mild February followed by some difficult lambing days in March and April. May and June were particularly dry, creating drought conditions in some places, although nothing like last year at this stage.

Luckily, we had enough grass to make haylage in early June, which ought to make quality feed having been baled in perfect conditions.

Our rotational grazing system helps to manage the peaks and troughs of grass growth. Having more control benefits both animal and pasture, preventing a build-up of unpalatable stemmy growth. We much prefer livestock to do the pasture topping while the topping machine stays in the shed.

The finished sheep trade appeared to be over supplied and lacklustre throughout winter and early spring. This changed for the better when a combination of the forthcoming festivals of Easter and Ramadan created a surge in demand. We were fortunate to be able to market most of our hill bred lambs during this period, justifying the expense of overwintering.

Having diverse markets for our sheepmeat products is one of the strengths of the UK sheep industry, adding value at the farm gate and preventing major retailer groups from dominating the market.

With shearing and the longest day now behind us, thoughts turn to the breeding sales with the expectation our gimmers will once again be in demand.



Eddie's gimmers are looking good ahead of this year's breeding sales.



NEMSA MULE SALES 2023

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Ewe & Shearling Sales

	July / August
Skipton	Wednesday 26th July
Bentham	Saturday 29th July
Carlisle	Friday 4th August
Skipton	Wednesday 9th August
Leyburn	Friday 11th August
Hawes	Tuesday 15th August
Lancaster	Wednesday 16th August
Carlisle	Friday 18th August
Kendal	Saturday 19th August
Skipton	Tuesday 22nd August
Bentham	Fri 25th & Sat 26th August
Barnard Castle	Tuesday 29th August
Longtown	Wednesday 30th August
	September
Leyburn	Friday 1st September
Cockermouth	Friday 1st September
Penrith	Tuesday 5th September
Carlisle	Thursday 7th September
Wigton	Saturday 9th September
Longtown	Tuesday 12th September
Skipton	Tuesday 12th September
Hexham	Wednesday 13th September
Kendal	Saturday 16th September
Carlisle	Monday 18th September
Kirkby Stephen	Friday 22nd September
Leyburn	Friday 22nd September
Bentham	Friday 22nd September
Skipton	Tuesday 26th September
Hexham	Thursday 28th September
Lancaster	Saturday 30th September
	October / November
Hexham	Thursday 5th October
Bentham	Saturday 14th October
Skipton	Tuesday 17th October
Hexham	Thursday 26th October
Skipton	Wednesday 1st November

Gimmer Lamb Sales

	September
*Hexham	Thursday 31st August
Skipton	Tuesday 5th September
Kirkby Stephen	Friday 8th September
Kendal	Saturday 9th September
Bentham	Saturday 9th September
Hawes	Monday 11th September
Hawes	Tuesday 12th September
Longtown	Tuesday 12th September
Middleton-in-Teesdale	Wednesday 13th September
Lancaster	Wednesday 13th September
Wigton	Wednesday 13th September
Barnard Castle	Wednesday 13th September
Barnard Castle	Thursday 14th September
Carlisle	Thursday 14th September
*Hexham	Thursday 14th September
Pateley Bridge	Friday 15th September
Cockermouth	Friday 15th September
Leyburn	Friday 15th September
Penrith	Tuesday 19th September
Skipton	Tuesday 19th September
Tow Law (at Hexham)	Thursday 21st September
St John's Chapel	Friday 22nd September
Bentham	Saturday 23rd September
Hawes	Monday 25th September
Longtown	Wednesday 27th September
†Lazonby	Wednesday 27th September
Lancaster	Friday 29th September
Leyburn	Friday 29th September
	October
Skipton	Tuesday 3rd October
Hexham	Thursday 5th October
Kendal	Thursday 5th October
Hawes	Monday 9th October
Lazonby	Wednesday 11th October
Leyburn	Friday 13th October
Bentham	Saturday 14th October
Hawes	Tuesday 24th October
Lazonby	Wednesday 25th October
Hexham	Thursday 26th October
Kirkby Stephen	Saturday 28th October

ITEMS IN BOLD ITALICS - denotes Sales at which: All lambs forward will be the bonafide property of members of the Association and will be subject to the scrutiny of Association Sale Inspectors.

* Denotes the Marts will be selling Mules out of both Northumberland type Blackface and Swaledale dams.
† in conjunction with Alston Moor Day Sale.

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