

SHEEP FARMER

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**NSA SHEEP FARMERS' CONFERENCE
AND MORE AS PART OF SHEEP HEALTH WEEK**

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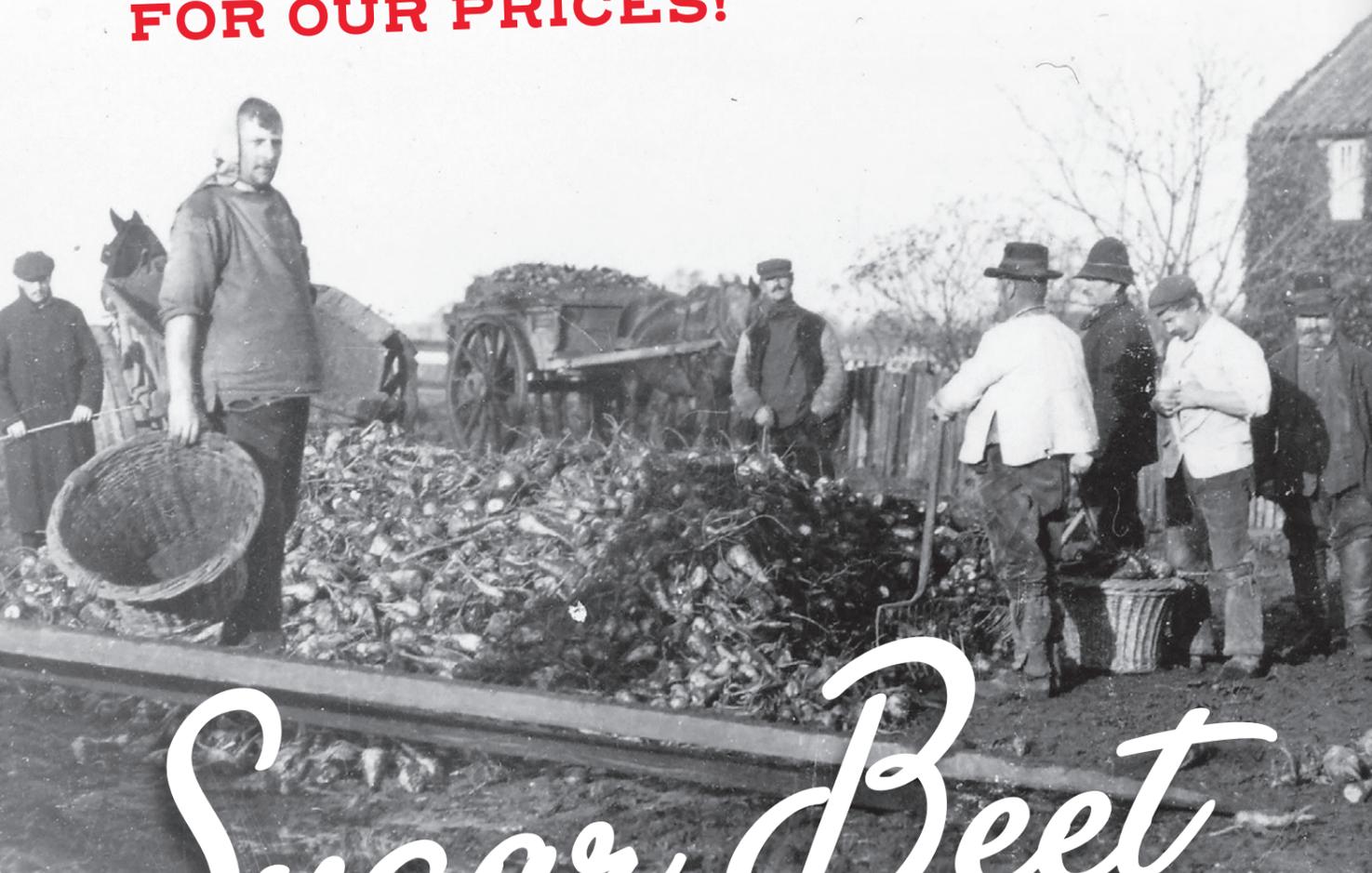
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Hold fast as the general election approaches



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

With a general election on the horizon, preparation is underway for the next round of the political merry go round.

I apologise for talking about it so early, but it will affect our future and there is a lot at stake.

Life would be easier and more enjoyable if we could just get on with the practical things instead of talking about food and farming policy, but policies, regulations and support schemes lay the foundations for what we can and can't do and set the direction of travel.

The trouble is the conflict between where we should be going and what politicians feel will win them votes. And the closer we get to an election the more important vote winning is, with senior MPs saying they know what needs to be done, but have to be in power to do it.

The economy versus the environment battle is already live. The ultra-low emissions zones in the Uxbridge by-election, and the rolling back of nutrient neutrality for house developers, are just two examples. It's going to be interesting to see how the main political parties position themselves as we get closer to the deciding event.

It's not as simple as the economy or the environment. As farmers we can't be green if our businesses are in the red, but if we don't get the green bit right we may well end up in the red. Politics, the right policies and effective support are essential ingredients for success.

Policy framework

NSA works tirelessly to secure as good a policy framework as we can for the success of sheep farming. While we are never going to get everything we want, I hope you agree we are doing a good job.

Influencing policy is something best done collectively, while on the farm there are always opportunities for individual gains. If we get things right we'll have policies that support farmers to do the right thing rather than go against our instinct to chase the King's shilling.

I believe this is where we are heading with the Sustainable Farming Incentive and the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway in England, and similar programmes in the devolved nations. They may

not be perfect and farmers are confused, but they are about encouraging good farming, providing support for actions that generally make sense.

Politics played a part in our first shipment of sheep embryos going to the USA in early September, something that won't benefit everyone but is good news and should lead to future opportunities.

This came about due to Britain's interests in global trade, and a lot of effort at a policy and development level to persuade the United States Department of Agriculture to remove the small ruminant rule, a restriction that prevented trade since BSE fears in the late 1990s. We can now export sheep germplasm into a market where our genetics are in demand.

Harmonious trade

Working with the US in this way may well pave the way for more harmonious trade in other goods, such as sheep meat.

Another hot topic where policy and practicality is currently not adequately connected is the forthcoming requirement for vet attestations for the export of livestock and livestock products to the EU. Defra is setting the rules in a usual risk averse way, working with devolved nations in order to satisfy EU import requirements.

The risks of poor implementation present a huge risk to our exports and, unless we are successful in persuading the date of implementation to be shifted, we have between now and December 13th for every farm to be either farm assured, be part of Pathway in England, or have an independent vet attestation visit from their vet. Alarming many vets and farmers are still unaware – more on page 3.

So back to where I started. It's important we engage with all the major political parties to ensure our needs are understood when election manifestos are created and to ensure we see a steady progression from where we are.

We don't want any more major pendulum swings in direction and we want policies that recognise the multi-functional and basic needs of society – to feel financially secure and to have food and an environment that affords health and happiness.



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NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference – tickets available now!

A reminder to NSA members that booking is open for the exciting, new, first ever NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference.

Taking place on Wednesday 25th October at the convenient location of the National Conference Centre, Solihull, Birmingham, the day offers something for everyone – so don't miss out.

Tickets are selling well for what promises to be an interesting day full of technical information and ample opportunity for networking and catching up with friends.

Full conference details on pages 8 and 9.



Hear from excellent speakers at the conference.

Celebrate St Andrews Day with NSA

NSA Scottish Region is looking forward to welcoming members to the second Lamb for St Andrews Day Dinner, which will be held on the evening of Thursday 30th November 2023.

Following the success of the inaugural dinner held last year, the region is delighted to again bring together the Scottish sheep sector to celebrate 'Lamb for St Andrews Day' and all it stands for. The meal at Carfraemill Hotel, Lauder, will be preceded by a welcome from Peter Myles, NSA Scottish Region Chair, followed by after dinner entertainment.

NSA Scottish Region Coordinator Grace Reid says: "It promises to be a fantastic evening and we look forward to seeing friends old and new. Please note tickets will only be available online via the NSA website and there will be a limited number of 10 tables of 10 placings." Tickets are priced at £37.50 +VAT. See page 4 for contact details for Grace.

Source your lambing help now

NSA members can now use the NSA Lambing List to advertise for lambing help in the forthcoming season.

The lambing list works as a directory for members to 'matchmake' with students looking for experience. Members wishing to use the list can do so by going to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or contacting NSA Head Office. Adverts can be placed from the beginning of October before the list will be made available to students at the beginning of November.

Anyone placing an advert is encouraged to read the updated guidelines for advice on how to use the list and how to advertise your placement to secure help during the busiest of times.



The NSA Lambing List is now open for adverts.

Move to digital membership renewals

NSA will move to online processing of as many membership renewals as possible from early 2024.

This means the paperwork you receive reminding you to renew your annual NSA subscription will be sent by email rather than post, unless we do not hold an email address for you. This will reduce the number of trees sacrificed for NSA membership paperwork and maximise NSA income spent on policy and technical matters rather than administration.

You will be given the opportunity to opt out of digital renewals and remain paper-based, but bearing in mind the cost and time of sending things in the post, we hope members will embrace this change and make sure NSA has your email address. All members will continue to receive the letter containing their membership card in the post. Email membership@nationalsheep.org.uk to update the information we hold for you.



Another huge success for the Love Lamb Week campaign.

Love Lamb Week another huge success

Love Lamb Week once again shared the many positive messages of sheep production as part of its annual campaign at the beginning of September.

The power of social media amplifies these messages with NSA's Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts reaching more than 60,000 people in the week alone. With levy boards, agricultural organisations and sheep farmers active throughout the week the campaign offered a fantastic opportunity to highlight sheep farming and its delicious, nutritious product to consumers.

Ambassador applications open again soon

The incredibly popular NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme will once again open for applications. The scheme will bring together 12 young sheep enthusiasts from across the UK early in 2024 to form the eighth cohort of Ambassadors. They will enjoy and benefit from a series of personal and career development sessions. NSA is excited to begin the search for the next Ambassadors to join the program. Applications for this special opportunity will open in November. For more information visit www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk or contact NSA head office.



NSA Ambassadors are aged under 35

Eastern Region Annual Members' Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Eastern Region will be held on Wednesday 8th November, 6pm at Heath Court Hotel, Moulton Road, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 8DY. The meeting is open to members and non-members, although only members can vote. Members not able to attend can appoint a proxy by downloading a form online. The meeting will be followed by interesting speakers and a carvery supper. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Execution of veterinary attestations imminent

The implementation of veterinary attestations is on the horizon and there are still fears of how the system might work in practice.

NSA feels there has been progress since the last edition and regular discussion with Defra and the wider industry means agreement on a practical system of introducing them is close. The intended roll out is still December 13th this year and, though information is being shared through the supply chain, there is still work to do.

There is still a lack of awareness in both farming and vet circles of this new requirement affecting all livestock farmers and it would be helpful if members could help spread the message. If you are not farm assured or part of the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway (England only) then the next time your vet is on farm ask them to provide you with a veterinary attestation relating to the export of livestock products.

Defra, with the long-suffering support of NSA and other farming organisations, is developing a national Q&A document to ensure the advice across the country has continuity. Email policy@nationalsheep.org.uk if you would like any further information.



Veterinary attestations will be a requirement for most UK farms.

Welsh Agricultural Bill progresses

Welsh Government has recently received Royal Assent for the Agriculture (Wales) Bill, which is the legislative framework for the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) that will replace the Basic Payment Scheme.

Welsh Government is hoping to publish a consultation on the final version of the SFS towards the end of 2023 after a period of co-design earlier in the year. More on page 14.



The Agricultural (Wales) Bill received Royal Assent.

Limited UK vaccine availability persists

Problems with supply of many vaccines continue with some more acute than others and unhelpful restrictions in pack sizes.

Access to clostridial, pasteurella, abortion, footrot and orf vaccines are among those with limited availability and, despite NSA speaking with vaccine manufacturers, a resolution is yet to be reached. NSA has also written to MSD, Veterinary Medicine Directive, Defra and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee to rectify the ongoing issues in supply and has also raised this issue at a ministerial level on the behalf of UK farmers. On the back of this, NSA has secured support from the EFRA Committee to conduct further investigation into the impact of vaccine shortage on animal health and welfare and to secure a long-term solution.

NSA is keen to hear from members regarding impacts of the shortage, for example increases in necessary antibiotic use, more cases of disease, higher losses and any financial and/or emotion affect – please email policy@nationalsheep.org.uk. Don't forget to join the next NSA Breakfast Club webinar on 4th October on this subject.



Vaccine shortages still burden the industry.



Solar technologies are high on government agendas.

Sustainable Farming Incentive to open soon

By the time this magazine reaches you, the first Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) payments should have been made to those who have registered for the scheme in England.

The government announced the SFI would be open for applications in mid-September alongside a series of commitments to boost British agriculture. NSA is pleased with the government's commitments to investment in solar technologies and small abattoirs to boost productivity across the supply chain and grow the economy, while improving the environment.

Join NSA webinar on vaccine shortages

Following the concerns across the industry surrounding vaccine availability, NSA is hosting the next Breakfast Club webinar on this topic.

Hear from Jonathon Statham – Chair of the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England – who will discuss the reasons why we are seeing a shortage across supply chains, how it might be rectified and how long this might take, as well as the wider long-term impacts across the livestock industry.

Dr Joe Henry – specialist sheep and beef vet from Black Sheep Vets – will advise on management practices, how to mitigate long term impacts and what to do if you can't access vaccines, along with what should be classed as priority stock and how you can move towards overcoming the impacts of vaccine shortages. Register to attend at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.



Johnathon Statham



Dr Joe Henry

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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 South East Region

Sarah Blake, Manager

Having successfully delivered the second annual NSA South East Region Ram Sale in September, we're looking ahead to the biennial Sheep Health, Wealth and Production Online Conference in October.

This event will take the form of three webinars in the NSA Sheep Health Week running from Monday 23rd to Friday 27th October.

In other news, Susie Parish, NSA South East Region Vice Chair, is on a winning streak, triumphant in the blade shearing class at the Royal Highland Show in June, then both the ladies and the blade shearing classes at the Great Yorkshire Show in mid-July, and the ladies' class at the Royal Welsh Show, shearing against a world record holder from New Zealand. Congratulations to Susie on this great achievement. See page 7 for a Thame Ram Sale report and page 9 for more on SHWAP Online.



Susie Parish is on a winning streak.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

Several regional members enjoyed a series of on-farm events advising on flock management, in particular a recent lameness event run by College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

Crosby Cleland, NSA Northern Ireland Region committee member, and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Alexander Boyd and his father David hosted two of these events, which were exceptionally well attended. They explained about their farming systems and Dr Jason Barley from Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) discussed causes of sheep lameness, prevention methods and appropriate treatment.

NSA Eastern Region

By Josh Brock, Manager

NSA Eastern Region has been busy with the NSA ram sales at Rugby and Melton Mowbray, and the region's Next Generation Shepherd competition, held at Godolphin Stud in Newmarket.

The day saw a field of 15 young shepherds battling for the top spot. Congratulations to all who participated, especially winner Jack Fletcher from Norfolk (pictured with NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker), who was placed both first in the main competition and also best under 21 competitor.

The region would like to thank Godolphin and stud director Liam O'Rourke for hosting the event and to all those involved, as well as all the volunteers, including James and Sue Bickerton, who travelled across from NSA Central Region. Full ram sale reports on pages 6 and 7.



Competition was fierce in NSA Eastern Region's Next Generation competition.

NSA Central Region

By Lizzy Wells, Manager

Work is underway for an NSA Central Region Field Day at Lincoln University, focusing on sheep in arable rotations and the use of cover crops to extend the grazing season.

There will be cover crops on display, electric fencing and vet-led workshops on sheep health. Keep an eye on regular NSA communications for when the date is confirmed.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region was pleased to join NSA South East Region in welcoming members to a farm walk on the regions' common border in September.

NSA Next Generation Ambassador Richard Taylor gave those in attendance an interesting tour of the livestock enterprises on the 1,100 acre (445ha) Grove Park Estate, Tetbury, Gloucestershire, which he manages. Since a change of ownership three years ago the focus shifted towards producing high quality food in a sustainable manner with a lean towards regenerative principles. Visitors saw the estate's flock of 400 Lleyn ewes producing crossbred finished lambs and purebred replacements, together with the largest flock of Cotswold sheep in the country.

Thanks go to Richard as well Grove Park Estate for the kind hospitality. NSA Marches Region now looks forward to planning future autumn events.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

August seems to have been busier than usual for the region with back-to-back events looking at the impact of ticks on sheep production in the uplands, particularly the disease louping ill.



The farm walk in August.

Many thanks to the Exmoor Hill Farming Network (EHFN) and Dartmoor Hill Farming Project for arranging these events in conjunction with Moredun, Torch Vets, Castle Veterinary Group and local farmers – these well attended meetings highlighted the importance of this issue and the value of coordinated action.

An interesting visit to Raddy Farm, Instow, Devon, courtesy of Christie Estates their farm manager Will, and Phil Goscomb of Savills, took place in late August. Attendees took a tour of the organic sheep farm looking at the rotation grassland management system.

Depending on how soon you read this, there may just be time to join an NSA, AHDB, EHFN and the Sheep Group meeting to raise awareness of the value of the halal and export markets – Monday 2nd October, 6.30pm at North Molton Sports and Community Centre, Devon, EX36 3QP.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

It was great to see so many people attending the region's event at J36 Market, Cumbria, early in September, discussing diversification.

Thanks must go to all the speakers and AHDB for its support in putting on this great day. A full report can be found on the NSA website. The region also enjoyed a useful discussion with Defra's Janet Hughes at Westmorland Show in September, alongside local farmers.

An NSA North Sheep washup meeting has now taken place and, due to its success, the region can continue funding its activities for another two years until the next event in 2025.



The diversity event showcased live butchery.



NSA Scottish Region has a Field Day planned for October.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

In August, NSA Scottish Region Committee members were given a guided tour of the Caltech Crystalyx factory in Cumbria.

All attendees thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon seeing where the raw products are brought into the factory before they are blended, cooked and poured into the easily recognised buckets.

Following the tour, a committee meeting took place to discuss recent and forthcoming events alongside key policy items and financial updates. NSA Scottish Region would like to thank Caltech Crystalyx for an insight to its fascinating operations.

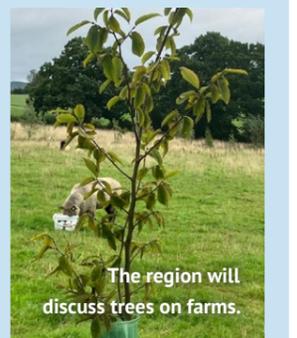
The region is now looking forward to welcoming members and others to its first NSA Scottish Region Field Day at Fearn Farm, Fearn, IV20 1TL, by kind permission of the Scott Family and main sponsors Elanco on Tuesday 31st October 2023. This interactive day will provide advice and plentiful opportunity for discussion surrounding business development and overall flock health and wellbeing, addressing and demonstrating best practice concerning the issue of flock health and welfare from efficient stock handling and data collection to parasite management and disease prevention.

Find out more at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

NSA Wales/Cymru Region is delighted to invite members to an open meeting called 'Trees on farms – what's the harm?'



The region will discuss trees on farms.

Taking place on Tuesday 7th November, 3pm in the International Pavilion, Royal Welsh Showground, Andrew Bronwin from Bronwin & Abbey, a chartered firm of foresters and surveyors, will focus on the commercial advantages tree planting can bring to farmers, highlighting how farming and forestry in combination can work to mutual advantage.

Arfon Williams, RSPB Cymru, will report on the present and future relationship between the society and farmers. Register your interest for the event with me directly.

Later in the autumn the region will once again return to the Welsh Winter Fair at Builth Wells. Members and non members are welcome to visit the stand for a chat and a cuppa.

A busy season showcases high quality stock at the 2023 NSA ram sales



A Charollais from Charles Marwood was top at the Early Built Sale.

Charollais takes top spot at NSA South West show and sale

The 35th annual NSA South West Ram Sale at Exeter Livestock Centre in mid-August saw trade peak at 2,600gns for the pre-sale show champion, a Charollais shearling ram from the Prestleigh flock of Tom Newth, Castle Cary, Somerset.

Texel sheep were the biggest in number at the sale with Michael Lear of Tiverton, Devon, topping the breed with his best at 1,500gns. Texel rams averaged £617 overall on the day with Texel females reaching prices up to 570gns.

Suffolks also reached 1,500gns for the pick of the pen from the Quick family of Crediton, Devon, and J. and M. Hartwright, Worcester.

A small but quality entry of crossbred rams saw a good day for the Quick family continue, selling their best Texel cross Berrichons to 920gns and a Charollais cross Texel to 780gns.

Female demand

Beltex's met a selective trade with the champion of the breed topping at 700gns for Tracey Cobbledick of Bude. Beltex females however proved good to sell with Louise Elworthy of Exeter, Devon, selling the female champion for 500gns.

Berrichon rams from Malcolm Yeo of Barnstaple, Devon, reached 680gns, 580gns and 450gns, while the Border Leicesters, which always prove popular at this fixture, saw sale organiser Sue Martyn of Launceston selling her shearling ewes up to 450gns. Rams from the same home reached 800gns. Other breeds selling successfully on the day included Hampshire Down, Dutch Spotted, Bluefaced Leicester, Lley and Blue Texels.



A Charollais shearling topped the NSA South West Ram Sale.

Fierce bidding on valuable stock at NSA Rugby Ram Sale

NSA Eastern Region was delighted to work with Rugby Farmers Market once again for its annual late August sale, which continues to attract farmers from near and far.

Dan Branson from Northamptonshire, who is well respected within the sheep industry, was the NSA judge, selecting Chris Timm from Yorkshire's top pen of four Beltex rams as his champion, receiving the winning rosettes before the sale.

With an increased entry on last year, the sale went extremely well with intense bidding throughout for all ram breeds. The top priced ram was a Charollais from J.S. Barber of Norfolk, sold for £882. The highest priced Texel ram from M. and L. Blakemore of Bedfordshire reached £819, with the same price paid for the top Suffolk from J. and R. Lowe of Warwickshire.

Buzz at NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale

A top price of 3,800gns with good averages reflected a solid trade with a premium for the best tups at the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale in early August.

Held at the Royal Welsh Showground, the sale is traditionally a trailblazer for the season. It didn't fail to set the standard and satisfy both vendors and buyers.

The highest price of 3,800gns went to a February-born Charollais shearling from Charles Marwood and Son. Mr Marwood said he was delighted and pleased with the overall run of prices.

Another Charollais shearling from NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale committee member Gareth Jones's Roblestone Flock, Pembrokeshire, made 2,000gns, a good strong shearling, third in his class in the Royal Welsh this year, where a few people had spotted him.

Good averages

Mr Jones also had a good average and highlighted the importance of the sale, especially for early lambing producers.

Paul Quick of Crediton, Devon, was pleased with his run of a dozen Loosebeare Texel rams. His yearling ram made the breed top price of 1,150gns. The Suffolk sale was topped at 750gns with a shearling ram from B.G., R.V. and B.H. Jones, Gower, West Glamorgan. Tim Prichard from Mid Glamorgan sold the highest priced Beltex cross ram at 1,020gns.

Commenting the day, Ram Sale Chair Graham Jones said: "There was a nice atmosphere but with a fairly selective trade. The best sheep were selling well and there was quite a good bottom in the market. There was some money flying about for the best rams and the crossbred rams had a buoyant trade."

NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale tops £2 million

Headline figures at this year's NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale were a top price of 24,000gns for a Texel shearling and a turnover of more than £2m.

High prices were underpinned by strong averages across the board, nearly 9% up on last year, with 90% of the rams forward sold.

The sale was distinguished by a busy and purposeful atmosphere as buyers flocked to the Royal Welsh Showground in mid-September, attracted by the promise of quality and choice. More than 3,000 rams from across the UK were inspected before entering the sale ring.

The sale turnover was up £71,916 on the previous year and averages were £756.52, slightly up on 2022. Geoff Probert, NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Vice Chair, was delighted with the day's trading and high quality of sheep in all sections. "The top end tups sold exceptionally well. There is such a high standard in maternal and terminal sires at Built," he said.

Mr Probert had the highest price Charollais of the sale, one of 30 Charollais shearlings, that sold for 4,000gns. In addition he brought 20 Texels from his Worcester-based flock, with both breed consignments achieving their best ever averages and all sold.

Top price

The sale's top price of 24,000gns went to Scolton Fieldmaster, the champion from the pre-sale show, a Texel reared and sold by Andrew Reed, who trades as W.O.J. Reed at Scolton, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. Its sire, Scolton Dynamo, was champion in 2021.

A Texel from Gwilym and Nerys Williams sold for 22,000gns. Caron Firefly was one of five shearlings sold by the family on their first visit to the sale, who also took the prize for best pen at the pre-sale show.

A Bluefaced Leicester shearling from Sophie Harding's Shrewbridge flock took breed champion and topped the breed sale at 3,000gns. A Suffolk shearling from Gareth Jones of Roblestone Hall, Camrose, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, sold for 4,600gns. Suffolk breeders were generally delighted with the day's trading, with a Devon vendor saying buyers were 'going back to basics'.

Bruce Ingram brought a consignment of his Logie Durno flock and took the crossbred champion; his Blue Texel sold for 2,400gns.

A Lley from G. and A. Fort, West Yorkshire, sold for 1,400gns to R.V. Jones, Wrexham, and the highest priced North Country Cheviot went for 1,800gns. The highest priced South Country Cheviot went for 1,600gns, sold by Douglas & Son of Roxburghshire, Jedburgh.



A Texel sold for 24,000gns was top at the Main Built Sale.

Suffolks star at NSA South East Region Ram Sale

Following the success of the inaugural NSA South East Region Ram Sale in 2022, the region was thrilled to work with Thame Farmers Mart again at the beginning of September.

This year there was a slightly steadier trade, with buyers a little more particular in their purchases. For the second year running Suffolks sold at a premium, topping the sale at £940 and £860 for shearlings from the Russo Suffolk pen of Chrissy Russo, Surrey.

The best of the Texels came from M. and L. Blakemore and Son, Bedfordshire, at £710. C.W. Thomas from Warwickshire topped the Charollais shearlings at £700. Meanwhile, Charollais ram lambs sold to £530 from Messrs Curtis, Worcestershire, and M.J. and J.A. Pinny of Northamptonshire saw bids reach £480 for their Suffolk ram lambs.



A Suffolk shearling from the Russo Suffolk pen of Chrissy Russo, Surrey, attracted buyers.

Quality sells well at Melton

A slightly reduced entry at the NSA Eastern Region Melton Mowbray Ram Sale, held as part of the Melton Midlands Sheep Fair in mid-September, meant rams met solid ringside bidding, with most rams forward going to new homes.

Pre-sale judging was carried out by Angela Tarry-Smith with a strong pen of Texel shearling rams from Phil Weaver, Nottinghamshire, being selected as champion.

Beltex entries were first into the sale ring with Chiltern Beltex selling a shearling to a top of 680gns. Blue Texels saw a high of 620gns from S.J. Timms of Warwickshire.

In demand

Texels were the most numerous at the sale. Topping the day saw shearling rams to 1,050gns from R. and B. Smith, Northamptonshire, with Phil Weaver close behind with rams to 900gns, 820gns and 800gns.

Charollais were ever popular with the second vendor into the ring, Charles Sercombe of Leicestershire, selling away to 880gns and 860gns, with C.D. Timm of Yorkshire, showing strong rams to 750gns on two occasions.

Messrs Hallam and Egglestone, Leicestershire, took the top price for a Suffolk shearling, selling to 780gns, with others from the same stable to 720gns and 700gns. Crossbred rams were still in strong demand, flying to 820gns for a Charollais cross Beltex from C.D. Timm.



This year saw another cracking ram sale at Melton.

There will be plenty to learn in NSA's Sheep Health Week.

New NSA conference a key feature of Sheep Health Week

As part of a weeklong campaign in late October, NSA will be hosting a range of activities focused on sheep health.

Whether you are looking for the chance to engage from the comfort of your own home or the opportunity to meet with fellow sheep fanatics to network and discuss current industry issues, NSA has an event for you as part of its Sheep Health Week.

Taking place from Monday 23rd October, the week will showcase the UK's world leading animal health and welfare practices across social media platforms and through two not-to-be missed events – the already established Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Online and the inaugural NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference.

Bookings are now open for both events. NSA members are urged to sign up or book tickets quickly to ensure their place at these conferences featuring leading names from the sheep and wider agricultural industry.

Follow #sheephealthweek on social media channels and share content to amplify the message that UK sheep farmers have the highest health standards in the world.



Flock health discussion will be a key part of the campaign.

Sheep Health, Wealth and Production returns



Having moved from an in-person event to an easily accessible online series two years ago, SHWAP Online is now recognised as a valuable source of sheep related information.

Organised by NSA South East Region, the free event takes the form of three webinar sessions running from 7.30pm to 9pm on Monday 23rd, Tuesday 24th and Thursday 26th October, each with leading names from the UK sheep sector.

The first online event will be opened by Dan Phipps, NSA Chair, with Yann Le Du, NSA South East Region Chair, welcoming attendees each evening.

Improving flock efficiency Monday 23rd October

Chaired by Matt Colston, Elanco, the session will discuss how efficiency can be improved by removing wastage from flocks. Lesley Stubbings, independent sheep consultant, will highlight how to take the first steps. JP Crilly, vet at Larkmead Veterinary Group, will discuss the value of flock health plans, debating the pros and cons. Influencing factors will be identified alongside suggestions on how to make best use of inputs and selected key performance indicators to monitor progress.

Measure to manage Tuesday 24th October

Matt Blythe, independent sheep consultant and NSA South East Region committee member, will chair this session. It will look at all types of measures, from budgets and performance figures to scores on sheep condition, to highlight the value of data to ensuring a successful sheep flock. This webinar will feature farmers and industry experts passing on their experiences using figures to improve their flock performance. Lawrence Martin, Stirlingshire sheep farmer and AgriWebb Ambassador, will discuss what technology is available and how to make it work for you. Nerys Wright of AHDB will cover body condition score throughout the annual cycle and Duncan Nellis, Northumberland sheep farmer, will share his experiences of deriving value from data.

Annual feed budgeting Thursday 26th October

Chaired by Susie Parish, NSA South East Region Vice Chair, this concluding webinar will focus on the question that, if you get out what you put in, why would you leave sheep nutrition to chance? Sam Lane of Cotswold Seeds will look at grass and forage crops to provide year-round grazing, allowing attendees to learn more about the different opportunities within sheep farming systems for rotational grazing and forage crops. Kate Phillips, independent sheep consultant and NSA Marches Region committee member, will discuss ewe nutrition through the year, focusing on planning and delivering the annual feed requirements.

SHWAP Online, sponsored by Elanco and MSD Animal Health, is free to attend. Register now at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/shwap.



NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference opens doors

The National Conference Centre, Birmingham, is the place to be this October as NSA welcomes members and other interested parties to its inaugural NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference.

This new, exciting event, taking place on Wednesday 25th October, in the middle of Sheep Health Week, offers sheep farmers the chance to hear the latest news and up to date information to assist in improving flock health and farm production while meeting up with fellow producers for an inspiring day out.

The full day conference offers three seminar sessions featuring headline speakers as well as ample opportunity to engage with other like-minded farmers and advisers.

Line up

NSA is proud to offer a line-up of the most knowledgeable experts from the UK sheep sector ready to pass on valuable information through interactive sessions and networking opportunities (see timetable, right).



Phil Stocker of NSA will open proceedings.

A new feature at the NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference will be the workshop discussion theatre offering a range of short, snappy and useful sessions throughout the day. Event sponsor Shearwell Data will deliver a workshop, as well as Elanco Animal Health, For Farmers, Healthy Hooves, Livestock Information, Provita Roxan and Tynedale Vets.

NSA members can buy a day ticket for a discounted price of just £50+VAT. A limited number are available so purchase now at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/conference.



Sessions will promote good flock health, which in turn benefits the national flock.

There will be variety of expertise throughout the week.



NSA Sheep Farmers' Conference timetable

Session 1 Sponsored by MSD Animal Health

Who does it best? Pros and cons of a four-nation approach to animal health and welfare.

Session Chair: Charles Sercombe, NSA Trustee and Animal Health & Welfare Board for England member.

With ongoing changes to UK farming policies, delegates will hear from government officials from across the UK opening proceedings.

Speakers: Peter Howard, Welsh Government; Martin Jenkins, Defra; Jenny Purcell, Scottish Government; Dr Sam Strain, Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland.

Session 2 Sponsored by Bonanza Calf Nutrition

Attitude and approach. To what extent is sheep health in the hands of individual producers? In conjunction with AHDB.

Session Chair – Amy Hughes, AHDB.

Join a panel of farmers from across the UK sharing their honest experiences. This will be a fascinating insight into the mindset of producers to resolve serious sheep health issues on farm.

Session 3 Sponsored by Kepak

Wise investments. A discussion on where money is best spent to improve health, welfare and productivity.

Session Chair: Liz Genever, independent sheep consultant and Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) Director.

With input costs high there has never been a better time to hear from top advisers on how to make flock expenditure go further.

Speakers: Emily Grant, pasture-fed livestock consultant; Dr Fiona Lovatt, specialist sheep vet; Dr Janet Roden, sheep geneticist.

UK sheep genetics are popular overseas due to breed diversity.

US demand for UK sheep genetics highlights interest in breed diversity

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

More than two decades of work by NSA and others looks set to pay off, with the USA starting to show the potential to become a significant trading partner for UK sheep genetics.

The continuous development and application of technology for genetic improvement is a key element of advancing sheep production in the US. Its sheep industry has contracted over time but appears to be at a juncture where a greater utilisation of technology can facilitate industry expansion to new markets and address inefficiencies in traditional practices.

Significant transformations include the increased value of lamb in relation to carcase size and conformation, and wool, within a downtrend in large-scale operations but a simultaneous rise in small flocks.

As part of this, sheep breeders in the USA have been looking to bring in UK genetics ever since trade was stopped in the late 1990s. But it wasn't until the 33-year embargo on lamb and ovine embryos from countries previously affected by BSE was lifted and a new ovine embryo export health certification was published last year that UK sheep breeders can now access to the all-important American market.

Ovine genetics

The first embryo shipment in August 2023 was valued at approximately £400,000 and should be the start of regular trade in ovine genetics, meeting strong demand from US customers eager to source direct from the UK.

One reason for this strong demand is that imported UK embryos will allow US producers to gain full pedigree status for a breed within one generation. It could take 10-15 years to reach this status using imported pedigree semen. UK embryo genetics will also benefit popular US commercial meat producing breeds.

Edward Adamson, NSA Northern Ireland Regional Development Officer and a genetics exporter, says: "The UK sheep industry is highly respected in the US and throughout the world. Our diversity of breeds, ability of sheep breeders and sheep technologists in the UK have gained respect and this recent development has the potential to increase further exports due to the number and quality of breeds available within the UK."

The government is beginning to recognise the importance of livestock genetics and last year the UK Genetics for Livestock and Equines Committee, formerly known as the Farm Animal Genetics Resource (FAnGR) Committee, was formed to provide advice to Defra and the devolved administrations on all issues relating to farm animal genetic resources, particularly its efficient production, conservation and sustainable use.



The Precision Breeding Bill is still an area of discussion.

The committee has key priorities but, because of recent rapid advances in genetics, genomic tools, data collection technologies and methods, it has put more emphasis on the need to better understand and characterise specific genomic variations in livestock.

The growth in knowledge has included developing a better understanding of the impact genetic variations can have directly or in combination with specific feeding, management or disease treatment and prevention options on a number of characteristics of interest, such

as production efficiency, efficiency of feed use, greenhouse gas emissions, disease resilience/resistance and welfare.

Current committee work has enabled the expansion of a strong platform for innovation to meet the challenges ahead, along with sustainably managing and conserving important resources for generations to come, and to support economic growth across the UK, but also widen the opportunities for UK genetics overseas.

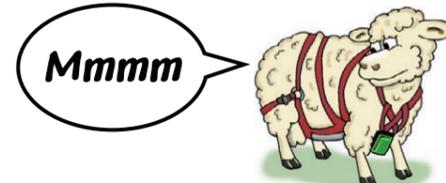
Technology

We are also seeing an increasing interest in the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act, which seeks to modify UK regulation on genetically modified organisms. The act has been seen to mark a major departure from EU policy, received Royal Assent back in March, and aims to encourage agricultural and scientific innovation by unlocking the potential of new technologies to promote sustainable and efficient farming and food production.

The bill seeks to ensure plants, animals and food/feed products developed using precision breeding technologies – those modified using specified technological methods such as gene editing to replicate changes which can occur naturally – are more widely accepted.

It is clear the UK genetic pool is unique in its wide ranging nature – and the breeds we have here make it in demand across the world. As we head towards more productive sustainable systems it is likely genetic choices will form a much larger role in the decision making of businesses. Within this we must recognise that sheep farming is carried out in a wide range of different environments, which is one reason we have and need such breed diversity.

The trick will be ensuring all our breeds have important roles to play in the future, while also making sure they are involved in improvement programmes that focus on generic and unique trait improvements.



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A targeted approach and accountability will aid management of UK uplands

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

With pressing questions around sustainability, nature loss, water quality, biodiversity and health and welfare, no one can deny livestock farming has challenges to overcome.

Agriculture is arguably luckier than other sectors, as we can offset our own emissions and play a key role in tackling climate change through climate-friendly food production, reducing methane emissions, storing carbon in trees, hedges, grassland and soils, and on-farm energy generation.

But we have a lot to do to get us there, and an uphill struggle to find and communicate the right balance between feeding an increasing global population, reducing the environmental impact and preserving natural resources for future generations.

This conflict is heightened further still in the UK uplands – where food production, the environment and culture arguably clash more than anywhere else, and there are multiple interests in how land use and management (for example, water quality and biodiversity) have a huge impact further downstream.

Uplands

The recently initiated review of livestock numbers on Dartmoor highlights far reaching and wider challenges for the industry, specifically around government commitments to support farmers and those living and working on the moor while joining multiple agencies together to safeguard long-term land management of areas with great environmental value.

Despite harsh conditions, for hundreds of years hill sheep and cattle have grazed and shaped

iconic landscapes across the UK and created one of the most important managed environments in the country. NSA stresses this on a regular basis, highlighting the often forgotten point that they are managed (and not natural) environments.

Keeping livestock on the hills is the key to maintaining their character, including the social fabric of these areas which include treasured landscapes such as the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales and Snowdonia. In fact nine of the 13 national parks in England and Wales are in hill farming areas, with a similar pattern observed in the other devolved nations.

Evidence

However, agriculture has struggled to scientifically demonstrate the positive impact managed grazing has to the wider environment. NSA for many years has pushed to develop research into the carbon capture ability of grassland and the benefits of grazing in the upland environment. Not only are the uplands environmentally key but they are also home to huge numbers of breeding ewes (and beef cows) across the country, making them crucial to food production for our nation.

Research does however indicate the steps agriculture must take in tackling its climate footprint and environmental impact. While negative impacts are serious, and can include pollution and degradation of soil, water, and air, agriculture can also positively impact the environment, for instance by trapping greenhouse gases within crops and soils, or mitigating flood risks through the adoption of certain farming practices.

The issue is the problems that can come from a single approach to all farmland. For example, when it comes wildlife numbers and diversity, the



Managed grazing can boost biodiversity.

curlow project in Dartmoor bears consideration. This found the rapid decline in numbers of breeding curlews, about 65% since 1970, was due to predation of eggs and chicks by foxes and crows, and habitat change or loss due to forestry and drainage.

Active management

Understanding the specific and multi-faceted reasons for curlew decline highlights the need for a more targeted approach to managing the uplands. Predator control, additional targeted grazing and active management may be a more suitable answer to the questions posed across all common land and uplands.

Another consideration is large amounts of our drinking water is collected in the uplands, water that is affected by the impacts of grazing on soils, water movement and erosion.

Levels of dissolved organic matter and dissolved organic carbon have almost doubled in upland waters since the late 1980s, while deposition of sulphur and nitrogen from the atmosphere over the last century has acidified upland streams, affecting aquatic invertebrates including mayfly and caddis fly, with knock-on effects on birds and fish.

Most of the farmed environment and the majority of the uplands has for decades been part of agri-environment schemes, developed by the EU and influenced by governments and Natural England, among others, to demand best management across grassland landscapes – yet environmental problems are still very much at the fore.

The accountability must span across industries to water companies, sewage treatment, aviation, forestry, transport and the public to ensure the wider environment can flourish for generations to come.

NSA boasts of sustainable UK farming

By Nicola Noble, NSA

NSA is continuing to emphasise the positive impact sheep farming has on the environment while exploring options for sustainable practices to buffer businesses against challenges and contribute to climate change targets.

Part of this work is an NSA report on sheep farming sustainability and its links to the environment, biodiversity, habitats, soil health and ecosystems. The report will consider what sustainability is and the role of a holistic view, while also investigating the positive attributes of sheep farming and highlight research gaps, looking at what more the industry can deliver and barriers to adoption. The report will provide scientifically supported facts to counteract negative accusations hurled at sheep farming.

On-farm cases studies will feature in the report, some of which will also be fed into COP – the yearly international meeting of leaders to work on solutions to tackle climate change. Case studies will showcase British agriculture and its positive role in climate change mitigation, as well as function as thought-provoking material.

NSA's report will be launched at the NSA Sheep Event at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire on Wednesday 31st July 2024.



NSA's sustainability report will be published next year.

Research activities

We can't claim sheep farming is sustainable without the evidence to support it – hence NSA is proactive in its research activities.

You may have read the short update in the last edition of *Sheep Farmer* on the Breed for CH4nge project, investigating the potential to breed sheep with a naturally low carbon footprint.

Methane emissions will be measured from 13,500 sheep using innovative new tools and technologies including portable accumulation chambers allowing predictions of methane emissions from grazing sheep alongside measures of health, production and efficiency traits at the individual animal level.

Further measurements, including rumen size and microbiota, will improve understanding of the underlying biology and ensure any reductions in methane emissions positively contribute to sustainable genetic improvement of ewe productivity on UK grass and forage.

A key part of the project will be the production of a sustainability EBV, relevant to any sheep breed or breeder, not just those directly involved. In addition, the development of protocols and tools required to genetically reduce the methane emissions and improve the efficiency of the national flock will occur, enabling wider adoption.



Breed for CH4nge will benefit the wider sector.



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Upland farming supports a huge amount of food production and nature.

Scottish economic report supports an increase in livestock numbers

Demonstrating that our red meat sector is worth £2.8bn to the Scottish economy, the QMS economic impact report could be interpreted as a compelling case to increase livestock numbers and contribute further.

And while Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, has acknowledged the report 'highlights the importance of red-meat based agriculture in remote rural areas', we still await further details on future farm support and related topics.

Farm support

Members are set to receive their Basic Payment Scheme and greening payments from mid-September 2023, which in total will deliver £550m to respective agricultural industries – but

we remain in the dark about what will happen in the longer term.

In late August, Ms Gougeon worked alongside Lorna Slater, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, to invite stakeholders



Challenges persist for proactive sheep health management in Scotland.

to a bracken roundtable. Short presentations were given by Scottish Government, NatureScot and the Bracken Control Group before a wider discussion on the overarching issues encountered

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



and possible solutions as part of an integrated management approach.

Attendees urged for the government to make decisions in a timely manner and effectively communicate them to ensure no financial detriment is incurred by land managers and operators, particularly in a response to the emergency calls for approval of asulam.

Flock health

A successful post mortem event organised by NSA Scottish Region in the summer reemphasised the importance of proactive flock health and remaining vigilant throughout the year – but it is frustrating that an important element of this is currently outside farmers' control because of

the continued battle around vaccine availability and affordability. It is imperative our flock is healthy, for farm business viability and the national economy.

Gwareddu Scab Project dips more than 107,000 sheep by end of August

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is pleased to see the Gwareddu Scab Project running effectively, with many of you hopefully taking full advantage of the free services.

With six technical officers in place, any suspect scab-infested Welsh flocks can be diagnosed by a vet and treated by approved mobile dipping contractors for free, while funding lasts. We hope this project will have a significant impact on scab levels in Wales, and pave the way for a sustained approach to scab control or, dare we dream, scab eradication.

Policy framework

August also saw the assent of the Agriculture (Wales) Bill, the legislative framework for the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) that will

follow on from the Basic Payment Scheme and Glastir agri-environment schemes and start in 2025.

The bill laid before the Senedd has been designed to support farmers, sustainable food production, and conserve and enhance the Welsh countryside, culture and language. NSA

is continually involved in the discussions and working groups surrounding the development of the SFS in Wales and will provide more as updates become available.

Contact the Gwareddu Scab Team on 01554 748576 or gwaredduscab@colegsirgar.ac.uk.



By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



The Agriculture (Wales) Bill claims to support farming and nature.

Climate action plan in Northern Ireland under consultation

With Northern Ireland's climate ambition now set in law, the next step is to determine the path to net zero – including the pace of actions in our own sector and associated milestones.

This means setting 2030 and 2040 emissions reduction targets and five yearly carbon budgets – legally-binding limits on the total amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted for a five-year period. These budgets will provide a useful way to benchmark progress in meeting climate goals.

As part of this, DAERA must prepare and publish a climate action plan to meet a carbon budget and set out how emissions reduction targets will be met. The intention was to consult on the carbon budgets and deliver the first draft climate action plan soon, but the complexity,

extremely difficult budgetary position and challenges associated with development, in the absence of ministers, means it will now be later this year before anything comes to light.

Carbon budgets

As the Climate Change Committee published its 'Advice report: the path to a net zero' a

consultation on carbon budgets and targets is underway.

On a more positive note, the prompt Basic Payment Scheme entitlements scheduled for early September were a welcomed relief for those struggling with the increase in costs without a corresponding lift in agricultural produce prices.



By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



The NI pathway to net zero sets out five year emissions budgets.

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Contrasting systems benefit from NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway

Nine young sheep farmers from across the UK are benefitting from access to top-class genetics thanks to a NSA Next Generation programme initiative.

Following the successful launch of the NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway in 2021, NSA was thrilled to offer keen young sheep enthusiasts the chance to compete for a prize of a voucher to buy a ram again this year.

In a development from the 2021 giveaway, as well as teaming up with Rob and Jo Hodgkins of Kaiapoi Romneys, NSA was pleased to also work with the Dutch Spotted Sheep Society to increase the number of young farmers who could win a voucher and to allow those with varied sheep enterprises to benefit.

Katie James of NSA says: "The NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway has been a great success again this year, with the addition of the Dutch Spotted ram vouchers really complementing the existing offering."

"The two breeds offer sheep farmers from contrasting systems the opportunity to benefit from top class genetics that will help progress their systems. Some incredibly deserving young sheep farmers have been awarded these vouchers and we look forward to seeing the benefit the rams bring to their flocks over the next year. Their journeys will be shared in future communications."

Romney rams

Journeying to Cambridgeshire to exchange their vouchers for maedi visna accredited, performance recorded rams from the Kaiapoi Romney flock were young shepherds Carys Jones from Carmarthenshire, Peter Sessford from Lincolnshire, Jenny and Richard Oglesby from Yorkshire, and Dafydd Owen from Denbighshire. The lucky four were selected as recipients of the rams as it was felt they would fit well into the young farmers' extensively-run, forward thinking systems.

Mr Hodgkins comments: "As a farm we have had the benefit of a lot of goodwill over the years. It's important to us to give back to the industry that has given so much to us. We hope this giveaway will make some meaningful change to these deserving young farmers."

Eilidh has put her Dutch Spotted ram voucher to good use.

Able to hit the pedigree Dutch Spotted sales this season were voucher winners Sam Lee from Northamptonshire, Eilidh Hortin from Cumbria, Lisa Lewis from Carmarthenshire, Kirsten Hardisty and Michael Houghton from Derbyshire, and Fiona Wilshaw from Cheshire.

Dutch Spotted

Edward Adamson of the Dutch Spotted Sheep Society says: "As a relatively new breed in the UK the Dutch Spotted Sheep Society understands the difficulties of getting started and is pleased to help these enthusiastic young sheep farmers establish their businesses and realise the qualities of the Dutch Spotted breed."

Eilidh Hortin was thrilled with the Dutch Spotted ram she was able to secure at the society sale at Carlisle at the end of August. She comments: "I was so pleased to be able to bring my chosen tup, Woodies Fastrack, home with me. I couldn't be more thankful to NSA for hosting this competition and giving me the chance to buy such a cracker of a tup. He has width, style, power, a seriously good skin and a fantastic confirmation which will hopefully be passed through to his lambs in spring. I look forward to using him on both my pedigree and commercial flock of Beltex cross Texel ewes."

Further detail of all the Romney and Dutch Spotted winners can be found on the NSA Next Generation website at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

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Next Generation workshops continue to educate and inspire

New entrants and those yet to equip themselves with basic shearing skills came together at the end of September for a fantastic NSA Next Generation event in Bristol.

Kindly hosted by respected shearers and wool enthusiasts Andy Wear and Jen Hunter of Fernhill Farm, the day gave attendees the chance to learn basic shearing skills and sheep husbandry from renowned British Wool instructors and training managers. An interesting discussion on how to make the most of wool followed a delicious lunch. Thanks to all involved in the successful day and British Wool for its support.

This was one of a two-year series of NSA Next Generation workshops – and next, the sustainable future of sheep farming will be the topic of discussion on Wednesday 15th November at the Rhug Estate, Denbighshire, North Wales.

Sustainable livestock

This day-long workshop will highlight how the renowned organic estate is dedicated to sustainable livestock production. Following a tour, attendees will hear from a host of industry experts providing practical examples of sheep farming production methods that are likely to become more common as farmers look to maximise production but minimise inputs. This workshop is not to be missed for anyone interested in

how sheep farming may change for future generations.

Before the end of the year, when attention turns to lambing, NSA Next Generation alongside specialist sheep vets and other industry representatives, will be providing best practice lambing advice for younger sheep farmers in Northern Ireland. Watch this space for a date and further details.

Into 2024 and there will be an NSA Next Generation 'Communicating with confidence' workshop, kindly hosted by Harper Adams University, Shropshire, on Wednesday 14th February 2024.

Whether you are looking to share positive messages of farming stories on social media, market a product or open your farm gates to public events, communication is key to delivering the correct message. The event will comprise of a series of small group sessions with industry experts allowing attendees to get the best from the day, as well as a whole group talk looking at the role and power of social media influencers.

Book a free workshop place at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or contact NSA Head Office.



Rhug Estate runs a diverse livestock enterprise including bison.

Enthusiastic young sheep farmers picked up valuable shearing skills at an NSA workshop.



NSA travel bursary opens up exciting opportunities for two lucky winners

Travel plans are well underway for the two winners of the 2023/24 NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation.

The award comes in the form of two generous £2,750 travel bursaries to support the chosen enthusiastic young shepherds in a study trip to explore the application of science in sheep production. The bursaries are made possible by funding from NSA alongside the Company of the Merchants of the Staple of England (the Staple). The awards are named in memory of Samuel Wharry, a sheep farmer from County Antrim who was NSA Chair and an advocate for the next generation.

Lucy Griffiths from Presteigne, Powys, has already started her travels, while Perry Parkinson from Dumfries is set to jet off soon, both of them to find out more about their chosen subject areas in relation to their own farming situations and for the wider UK sheep sector.

Grazing

Lucy won the award due to her interest in more sustainable grazing practices, including overwintering. She has used the funding to enhance existing travel plans, allowing her to visit New Zealand, Australia and farms in the UK.

"I visited New Zealand in June, working on a dairy sheep farm before progressing to larger sheep stations in the South Island. It was

interesting to make new farming connections and learn how they have adapted their farming systems to suit the region and regulations," she says.

"I will shortly be travelling to Australia to see how farms prepare for winter grazing during the harvest and growing season in addition to the management of livestock on a larger scale.

"The long-term aim of the study is to help both myself and other farmers in the improved utilisation of winter grazing options, which will become particularly relevant as the cost of feed continues to rise and the need for farmers to maximise utilisation increases.

"I am excited and motivated to gain as much information on the theoretical and practical implementation of grazing and cropping systems," she concludes.

Perry's chosen subject area is to investigate anthelmintic resistance, aiming to assess methods for sustainable parasite control, good practice techniques and innovation. He will travel to New Zealand in late October and build on the UK contacts he's already spoken to.

"The aim of my study is to visit multiple farmers and corporations within New Zealand to get a better and more accurate understanding of the level of anthelmintic resistance present.



I will then compare this with the UK, looking at control methods used to help reduce and/or manage the risk," he says.

Perry has organised visits to stud farms and work experience with veterinary practices, sheep milking farms and FEC companies.

Insight

"By visiting these businesses, I'll be able to collect a range of knowledge and gather insight into current practices – simple grazing management

strategies, genetics and/or parentage selection for resistance, dag scores dosing strategies, FEC – and collate and compare this with the UK," he adds.

Investigating breeding strategies, testing regimes, treatment choices and alternatives to anthelmintics will give a greater understanding of the level of resistance and farmer practices across countries.

"If I can use this trip to help sheep farmers in the UK or even make them aware of the never-ending challenges we're facing, then that's good enough for me," he says. "I really enjoy learning from the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) website and worm resistance in general, as it seems like an endless lesson with plenty of surprising facts along the way."

Lucy and Perry will continue to share regular updates, then their final reports in summer 2024.



Perry travels in October to begin his research.



Lucy has learnt a lot in New Zealand.

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Opportunities seized help NSA Next Generation Ambassador expand



NSA Next Generation Ambassador Fred Love is humble about the progress his farming enterprise, Love Farming Ltd, has made since he joined the NSA programme back in 2016.

But a growth in ewe numbers from 600 to approaching 2,000 is remarkable for a first generation farmer who only started his business just over 10 years ago.

Fred now runs 1,300 of his own ewes across a mix of owned and rented ground and a further 600 in a share farming agreement from his farm base near Retford, Nottinghamshire.

In addition, he finishes in the region of 3,000 store lambs each winter on 900 acres (365ha) of local arable farmers' cover crops. He has also started a small herd of outdoor-calving Stabiliser cattle.

NSA Ambassador

Fred credits the NSA Next Generation programme with helping expand his horizons. "The visits we went on as an ambassador group and also as part of other Next Generation events, and the good people it put me in contact with, definitely helped me and opened my eyes to the opportunities available," he comments.

While increasing stock numbers Fred has looked to breeds suited to his outdoor lambing, low input system. "We now have Aberfield and Highlander ewes and keep those fairly pure with the Aberfield SR and Highlander tups. As we have bigger ewe numbers, we are trying to avoid

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 Fred Love, who joined the programme in 2016.



Fred became an NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2016.

bringing in a lot of replacements and have found these ewes to have good longevity."

This year Fred has increased infrastructure on his owned land, erecting permanent fencing to allow him to grow numbers a little more and exploit the benefits of rotational grazing.

He comments: "One of the stand out visits we went on during a NSA Next Generation session in Scotland was to a system with a strict rotational grazing practice that allowed them to grow and finish stock well and increase stocking densities. I hope to work towards this."

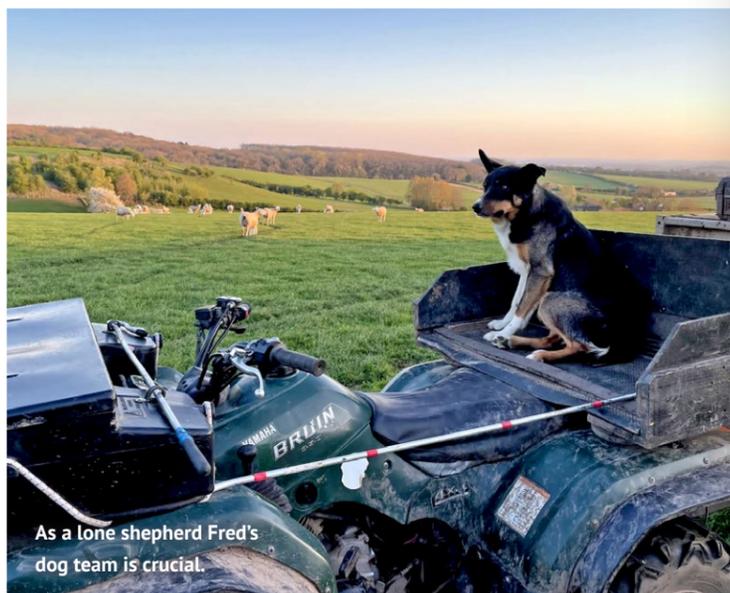
Seeking help

Fred has about reached the limit of what he can manage on his own, having only taken on help during lambing to date. "I'm on the verge of needing to find an employee now, but it could be a challenge to find a good stockperson as our area is predominantly arable farms," he says.

For the main part however, Fred's location is what is helping him drive his business forward. "We are in a prime location to take advantage of many arable systems moving to more regenerative practices that include sheep as part of their rotations, and with the new support schemes such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive rewarding arable farmers for using cover crops over winter. Because of this we are in demand to provide stock for winter grazing," explains Fred.

"There are many farmers keen to have sheep on their arable farms now but it's important you build a relationship with them that will work for both parties. I'd advise sticking to what you have said you will do – including agreed stocking dates – and don't break their trust. Ensure your agreement paperwork is correct and reliable and, most importantly, don't let your sheep escape all the time due to bad electric fencing!"

Ewe numbers have grown quickly in the enterprise.



As a lone shepherd Fred's dog team is crucial.

A high energy and protein feed block can offset low quality forage.



A 20% drop in last year's scanning results proves supplementation is critical this tuppung season

RUMENCO

Grass may be available, but the quality is not. As forage quality plummets, here's how supplementation can support this year's tuppung success.

A Rumenco survey of scanners representing nearly 500,000 sheep across England, Scotland and Wales found last year's scanning results to be back an average of 20%.

According to Dr Alison Bond, nutritionist for Rumenco, scanning percentage decline was a result of widespread drought hurting both grass quality and availability.

"The data found early lambers were impacted the most, with the decrease in scanning results being a result of more singles, not more barrens," says Dr Bond.

While this summer saw little rainfall and high temperatures impact early grass production, the damp and cool weather pattern stretched across mid to late summer has put livestock producers in a unique position – potentially one of false confidence, warns Dr Bond.

Industry data

"When we look at industry data, grass growth is well above the four-year average from mid-July onwards. However, quality has largely been below the previous three-year average since the start of 2023," explains Dr Bond. "While there is plenty of grass available going into the tuppung season, it is essentially rumen fill with low nutritional value."

Metabolisable energy (ME) and protein and sugar levels have been below average having never fully recovered from last year's drought. In 2022, grass averaged 11.11 ME and 19.2% protein. In 2023, grass averaged 11.06 ME and 18.2% protein – hitting its lowest ME of 10.3 in early July and lowest protein of 14.1% in late June. This is a concern, says Dr Bond, as it could have limited ewe body condition gain post-weaning. To gain one unit of BCS from weaning to tuppung, ewes require grass to be at least 11 ME.

Grass sugar levels have also been significantly below average

since last year, being nearly 50% lower in April and May. This will be limiting protein supply to ruminants, as the rumen microbes require sufficient fermentable energy in the form of starch and sugar to fully utilise the protein available in grass.

Anecdotally, scanners whose customers supplemented sheep last year felt their scanning percentages benefited from the additional nutrition.

According to Dr Bond, the decline in forage quality paired with the upcoming seasonal decline in availability is going to make strategic supplementation essential this tuppung season to both stretch forage stocks and meet ewe nutrient demands.

Nutrient gaps

A high energy and protein feed block like Rumevite Sheep Super Energy Plus Fish Oil will fill nutrient gaps while also boosting lambing percentage by up to 22% when fed in the eight weeks around tuppung.

"The supplement block formulation helps ewes reach optimal body condition ahead of tuppung, supporting ovulation – which can lead to more ewes holding service in the first cycle," says Dr Bond.

According to Dr Bond, Rumevite is a multipurpose product, also delivering daily requirements of minerals, vitamins and trace elements to boost livestock performance while supporting immunity, health and fertility.

The combination of little and often feeding and increased saliva production from licking the hard pressed feed blocks provides a flow of nutrients through the rumen to support a healthy rumen bug population. This supports forage digestibility, ensuring stock makes the most of the grass or forage that they do have.

"While there is plenty of grass available this year, farmers are going to have to provide additional supplementation to offset the low quality, and to fulfil ewe nutrient requirements for optimal scanning percentages," concludes Dr Bond. "Using a multi-purpose supplement like Rumevite Sheep Super Energy Plus Fish Oil will pay dividends by increasing forage utilisation, delivering essential nutrients to ewes and boosting fertility."

Learn from your mistakes, work hard and maintain a never-give-up attitude

By Lord Inglewood, NSA President



Born into a traditional land-owning family with a long-standing involvement in politics, it is not surprising my life has taken me partly in a political direction.

But I have never given up my lifelong enthusiasm for farming and I consider my role as the current custodian of our family estate and farms in Cumbria to be very important.

I am the second Lord Inglewood and 13th family owner of Hutton in the Forest, near Penrith, Cumbria, a traditional estate with surrounding farmland including some within the Lake District National Park. This upland area comprised four farms when I was a boy but is now just two – one let to a local family and the other farmed in hand.

Scaling up

After finishing university at Cambridge I set upon handling some of the problems facing the estate. This was when Britain was joining the European Community and it was clear to me the scale of farming would become bigger.

I concluded we should keep the land surrounding the main historic house in-hand and, when a couple of small hill farms became vacant, I took the decision to run them with a manager on borrowed money, increasing our own farming operation. I would congratulate my younger self on making the difficult but right decision.

We always tried to ensure our labour units were fully deployed to maximise return from wages paid and investment made. Today we're

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 Lord Inglewood, NSA President.



Lord Inglewood uses his political position to speak proactively for agriculture.

able to keep enough stock to keep our workforce properly employed while being able to reduce some sheep numbers in line with stewardship requirements with a view to aligning with future environmental requirements.

We don't farm for grants but are living in a world where farming outputs, especially upland farming, are being recalibrated. I now have to consider selling carbon as if it were meat, if that's what the market demands. Increasingly, agriculture is not going to be the only thing happening in the countryside.

Away from the farm I qualified as a barrister and have worked as a chartered surveyor, but it is my political career where I have spent most time. In my roles as a Member of the European Parliament and as a junior minister in the John Major Government I frequently found myself as a voice for the countryside and predicaments

facing, in particular, upland farming.

One generic agricultural problem is working in small units where everyone is looking inwards on what they're doing. I would remind my younger self to always look outwards, to be aware of opportunities but also hazards to your business. Involvement in organisations such as NSA and its networks should enable you to make a better go of it.

Problem solving

There are certain approaches I would encourage the younger version of myself to adopt. Where there is a problem don't run away from it. If things start to go wrong, try and sort them quickly.

I have also found the easiest solution is often the wrong one. Things must be thought through and one should be careful about being 'fashionable'. As a general rule, if you start something you should finish it – and to do that you must get stuck in and work hard.

Most importantly, you need luck, and of course to some extent you can make your own. Many might think I've had an easy life, but I've navigated my share of problems. I would reassure my younger self you will find a way through, if you put your head down, be sensible and are not greedy. Everyone makes mistakes, but you should aim to never make the same one twice.

My wife has been a great ally without whom things would have been very different and may have been my most important and fortunate decision.

Finally, always keep a close eye on the cash flow and the budget. While they are not everything, they are important, and as a rule you should assume they will not work out quite as well as you hope.



A lifelong passion for farming has driven the NSA President's career choices.

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Pedigree stock is used to produce quality finished lambs.

Passion for livestock production drives work of NSA Scottish Region Coordinator

By Katie James, NSA

From a young age there was no escaping an involvement with pedigree livestock for NSA Scottish Region Coordinator Grace Reid.

"Many of my earliest memories are helping my dad and Granda with an endless number of sheep duties and the lectures that always followed closely behind! It was then, and still is, a matter of living and breathing sheep," she says.

A longstanding passion for farming and livestock in particular has been passed down through the generations of the Reid family, leading to Grace and her family's establishment of the Kelso and Meadowvale pedigree Texel flocks.

"I'd like to hope that neither of our flocks need any introduction," comments Grace.

Having spent her early childhood growing up in Ballygawley, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, a decision was made by Grace's parents to move to Scotland in 2006 to consolidate and develop the family's farming activities.

An initial move was made to Kelso in the Scottish Borders before settling near Alloa, Clackmannanshire, in the Central Belt. "I then studied agri-business at Harper Adams University from 2012 to 2016 before being employed in the livestock industry procuring high-quality beef and lamb to meet demanding retail customer specifications," she explains.

Ambition

Following an ambition to secure her own farming enterprise, Grace and partner Bertie established Ochil Agri Limited, near Auchterarder, Perthshire, in 2020, an agricultural contracting business run alongside the couple's mixed arable and sheep enterprises, as well as Grace's commitments to NSA Scottish Region.

Shortly after the establishment of this business Grace and Bertie were given the opportunity to take on a farming tenancy of 100 acres (40ha) in their local area to be run in conjunction with their full-time jobs.

"This helps keep us busy," Grace comments, "I've always helped out on the family farms growing up and still do alongside everything else I currently have on so it all takes a bit of juggling to make sure I am in the right place at the right time – but it usually works out in the end."

Having taken on the tenancy, work quickly began on some overdue maintenance including field drainage and cutting back gorse and trees alongside changing grassland to arable production.

Grace explains: "The land had a long history of being in grass and we felt it would be a good time to break the cycle and make use of some of the arable equipment we had invested in prior to the tenancy." This decision paid off for the couple with the increased prices received for spring barley at the time.



Grace Reid.

This remains the main cereal crop, with the farm keeping a 50:50 split of cereals to grass to ensure there is enough forage for the sheep enterprise and also an income for hay and haylage sales throughout the winter.

Grace continues: "We have been looking into forage crops for the winter months but have been relatively lucky with the weather in recent years not to need them."

Commercial stock

Although Grace's passion for pedigree stock remains strong, she is aware of the benefits of producing sheep suitable for commercial markets.

"It has always been my creative way of thinking to remain focused on the mainstay of the sheep industry to provide a type of sheep a commercial breeder can associate with."

With this in mind, Grace has introduced a selection of different breeds to the enterprise including Rouge, Bluefaced Leicester and Beltex bloodlines.

"These are proving to be excellent crosses not only for maternal lines but also for easy fleshing and carcass traits," she comments. It is from these crosses Grace and Bertie established

a commercial flock with 100 ewe lambs to be lambed as gimmers, the foundation of the system they are now working with today.

More niche breeds are also finding a place within the enterprise, with experiments to produce finished lambs from Badger Face and Blue Texel rams. "They've produced some quirky results to say the least," she adds. "But I am keen to explore a mix of breeds to produce a long carcass lamb with plenty of gigot without being over fleshed. To satisfy my more aesthetic needs, an animal must also be correct on its legs, have a nice tight skin and be able to hold a flashy head up high."

Outdoor lambing

While the family has always lambed indoors due to the unpredictable Scottish weather, time of year and available forage, a move to later season, outdoor lambing has been made successfully.

Grace explains: "More recently we have pushed back our commercial flock lambing to late April to utilise the better weather, grass and to facilitate an outdoor lambing system. Not only does this make it easier on the sheep it is easier to fit in alongside other lambing and arable commitments."

All commercial stock currently goes to the local livestock markets, an asset to rural communities Grace is keen to protect, with pedigree stock being sold privately.

"We feel it's important to support our local markets as, without them, there would be an even bigger price differential than what is already seen. In addition to this, they accept a wide range of specifications which is very convenient when time is a short commodity," she explains.

Having progressed the sheep and arable enterprise in a short period of time, Grace and Bertie have also added several beehives to the farm to help with crop pollination and soon hope to incorporate some pigs into the mix.



Grace is experimenting with niche breeds for producing crosses.

"We do hope to expand our sheep numbers to utilise grass availability and also increase the size of the overall farming business, but this will have to wait for when local opportunities arise," says Grace. "Along with the rest of Scotland waiting to hear about future farm support, we continue to make blind decisions regarding our future and investments. While we are in the fortunate position of not being solely reliant on this income it is a welcomed addition to the cashflow. Whether it be right or wrong, we are awaiting future policy change announcements before making any substantial changes to our practices."

NSA role

Grace's awareness of the agricultural policy affecting her enterprise and others makes her well placed to split her time between her farm commitments and her role as NSA Scottish Region Coordinator. Having first become aware of NSA on moving to Scotland and not being put off by memorable NSA Scot Sheep events in torrential

rain, she now is a critical component of the association's work to represent the sheep industry.

"My role has expanded over the years of being with NSA and I now have more to do with the financial running of the region and presence at events in addition to policy work – it is all an interesting mix.

"A main priority for me is to ensure the Scottish sheep industry is represented at a level that reflects the true occurrences of modern day and that it has a wide range of available resources and support to be successful in the future. It's essential informed decisions are made on a daily basis, by those in the sheep industry and the government and public. We are seeing a decrease in the national livestock numbers with an increasingly disjointed public – this does not bode well for anyone's future."

"I've always helped out on the family farms growing up and still do alongside everything else I currently have on."

Grace Reid



The addition of beehives will help with future biodiversity.

Farm facts

- Grace has been the NSA Scottish Region Coordinator for three years.
- Runs a mixed farming business on a 100-acre (40ha) tenancy.
- Pedigree livestock is at the heart of the growing commercial ewe flock.
- Additional enterprises such as beehives and free-range pigs are planned to help improve farm biodiversity.

Grace and Bertie have trialled a variety of ram breeds.

Marketing round up

Here NSA invites the levy and marketing boards to update members on efforts to sell sheep meat and wool throughout 2023.

Targeting the next generation with 'Good Honest' lamb



In order to strengthen the positive story behind Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) lamb, LMC is also busy furthering opportunities for the sheep sector to thrive.

LMC joined industry partners to form the Northern Ireland Sheep Industry Taskforce. Its vision for the future outlines the vital role sheep play in the sustainability of the rural economy at both economic and environmental levels, with a focus on genetics, health, use of data and informed breeding decisions.

Consumer awareness

To promote NIFQA lamb, LMC relaunched its advertising campaign, 'Good Honest Food' earlier this year. Since 2020 there has been a marked 20 percentage point uplift in consumers buying NIFQA lamb, with confirmation consumer awareness of the logo continues to grow year on year.

Informing the next generation of consumers about the credentials of NIFQA lamb remains a key area of work for LMC. The last academic year saw delivery of 375 post-primary and 100 primary school cookery demonstrations, which were well received.

Demonstrations teach pupils how to prepare and cook NIFQA lamb including opportunity to taste the dishes, while offering an insight to the farm to fork journey of lamb.

A series of new recipes has been developed by LMC this year, which are already available online and will be used at upcoming sampling events and demonstrations. [Find the new recipes at www.beefandlambni.com](http://www.beefandlambni.com).



Popular chef James Devine fronts LMC's 'Good Honest Food' campaign.



New campaign promotes Welsh farmers as 'Experts in their Field'.

HCC campaign promotes farming expertise



HCC's 'Experts in their Field' campaign focuses on the expert knowledge and dedication of Welsh farmers in producing the finest lamb.

Farmers Ben Williams, Emily Jones and Alwyn Phillips from across the breadth of Wales feature in the campaign with Snowdonia farmers Ken and Lisa Markham starring in the television advert. The imagery captures the dramatic Welsh landscapes and essence of family farms.

The take-home message for the campaign is Welsh farmers are experts in producing lamb; they have been producing high quality lamb for generations and, if consumers are buying lamb, they should chose PGI Welsh Lamb.

Digital and print adverts can be seen on billboards in Waterloo station, London, and outside supermarkets across England and Wales. The television adverts are available on Sky, ITV and S4C as well as across social media and other digital platforms.



Cookery trailer

The campaign was also brought to life through HCC's presence at events over the summer and autumn. The HCC cookery demonstration trailer was featured at BBC Good Food Festival near Chichester, West Sussex, as well as the St Fagan Food Festival in Cardiff. Food-festival go-ers learnt how Welsh Lamb is produced sustainably and in harmony with the natural landscape and resources, as well as sampling some tasty original recipes using various cuts of Welsh Lamb.

HCC is also working with supermarkets and retailers to elevate the 'Experts in their Field' campaign, with supermarket promotions continuing into autumn and resources available for butchers stocking Welsh red meat. HCC is also working with foodservice providers to promote Welsh Lamb within the hospitality sector, further cementing Welsh producers as the 'Experts in their Field'.

Campaign champions British meat after rule change



The term British has been included in an AHDB marketing campaign for the first time, through this autumn's burst of 'We Eat Balanced' activity.

AHDB has previously been restricted from using British as the primary message because of EU state aid rules. But, earlier this year guidance on the new UK rules was published, opening the way for change.

The campaign returned in early September and runs until October 22nd, aimed at promoting consumer awareness and fostering long-term positive attitudes towards naturally produced British red meat and dairy.

Union flag

The change also allows more prominent use of the union flag in campaigns, providing it does not disrupt international trade. AHDB will embrace this at future export events.

Like previous bursts of 'We Eat Balanced' activity, consumers will be informed about the numerous nutritional benefits of incorporating lean red



meat and dairy to their diet through social media, newspapers, on-demand video and in the stores of eight major supermarkets. On-pack stickers will include links to direct shoppers to healthy meat and dairy recipes.

Reputation and marketing were highlighted as key areas of AHDB's work in levy payers' responses to the ballot held earlier in the year.

Levy payers and farming influencers are encouraged to engage with the campaign through AHDB resources, assets and merchandise. [More information at weeatbalanced.co.uk](http://www.weeatbalanced.co.uk).

Learn, live, leisure and lavish with Love Lamb Week



QMS used September's 'Love Lamb Week' to celebrate the provenance and versatility of Scotch Lamb, highlighting its nutritional benefits, the green pastures it hails from and delicious lamb recipes.

The annual industry-wide initiative is supported by all levy bodies, as well as NSA and other industry bodies.

The line up included learning about the nutritional value of lamb with dietician and QMS board member Dr Carrie Ruxton, immersion in the life of a shepherd with former AgriScot Sheep Farmer of the Year, Calum McDiarmid, and falling in love with the taste of lamb with a new recipe that is quick and easy to cook, but packed full of flavour.



Online activity

Kate Rowell of QMS said: "We've created a variety of online advertisements to illustrate how families across Scotland can enjoy Scotch Lamb and how lamb can support a healthy diet and lifestyle."

Website takeover advertising launched in early September and continued for three weeks, offering recipes for cooking inspiration, during and beyond Love Lamb Week.

Two specific events in September illustrated how Scotland's quality assured livestock farms not only produce nutrient-rich red meat to eat, but also involve a range of interconnected natural cycles and ecosystems which benefit us all. [More at makeitscotch.com](http://www.makeitscotch.com).

Finding innovative ways to improve wool demand



The need to find innovative ways to use British wool and drive demand has never been greater.

Which is why British Wool has focused on product development and innovation by working with a number of brands, across the UK and Europe, to make this happen. It's vital traditional volume markets including carpets, mattresses and clothing are not neglected, but driving new demand over time will help deliver higher returns.

Recent projects include the use of British wool in a diverse range of products such as rope, tennis balls, trainers and insoles. For example, the first 100% certified British wool rope has been launched, becoming joint winner of the Wool in Innovation Awards.

Collaboration

One of Europe's largest sustainable tennis/paddle ball manufacturers has collaborated with British Wool to create the world's first renewable balls to help reduce pressures on landfill and incineration.

British Wool is also collaborating with Bangor University, developing new uses for wool that should come to fruition over the next 12 to 18 months.

Innovative wool products should inspire others to use British wool – while the variety of sheep breeds in the UK enables British Wool to work to specific brand requests ensuring it is able to use the optimum wool for their end application.



Product innovation is helping increase demand.



Warning not to be complacent about hazards of animal medicine application

By Katie James, NSA

It is no secret that farms are dangerous places – but rather than being the result of machinery or livestock, some of the most serious hazards can be found in sheep producers' medicine cabinets.

Spillages, accidental injections and contaminated airspace all potentially causing health risks on a regular basis. Despite all treatments displaying warnings, these are not always heeded when the priority is getting a job done rather than taking time to assess the risk.

But sheep and beef farmer Anne MacPherson from Aberdeenshire will always make the effort to heed the warnings in the future after discovering the risk posed by pour on treatments this summer.

"I had a leaking valve on a bottle of fly control pour on and got a fair dose before realising the fault. After beginning to feel very ill I was rushed to hospital with potential kidney failure. With lots of intravenous fluids and anti-sickness drugs, plus scans, numerous tests and the best care you could ever ask for, I was given the all clear and sent home to carry on trying to flush out the toxins and make a full recovery," she explains.

"If I hadn't been otherwise fit and healthy it could have been a lot worse. I'd urge everyone to not take the warnings on the labels lightly. It wasn't a pleasant experience but could have been a lot worse!"

Self injection

One common self-inflicted injury on farm is accidental self injection. On initial presentation these injuries may seem minor and not warrant follow-up treatment but the reality can be very different. Needle injuries can range from soft tissue damage, infection from dirty needles or live viral or bacterial vaccines, to extreme tissue irritation, inflammation and necrosis, and potentially amputation of affected areas – most commonly fingers.

Frequently self-injection occurs due to handling restless animals and/or unsafe needle practices leading the Veterinary Medicines Directive (VMD) to stress using needles in an unsafe way carries risks of serious, potentially even fatal injury.

To minimise the risk farmers are reminded of the correct procedure when vaccinating or

administering other treatments, this includes safely restraining the animal, considering using an automatic needle resheathing safety device and using a sharps bin, ideally with a needle remover notch to avoid manual removal of needles.

Safety data

To keep farmers informed on risks, the National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) provides advice on safe administration of products and ensures all veterinary products display product label information.

"This should be the first place to check before conducting treatments to identify any special precautions that should be followed," says Alison Glennon of NOAH.

"If there is accidental exposure, the product data sheet again will give advice on what to do. If medical attention is needed then simple advice is to make a note of the name and active ingredient of any medicines used and to bring the packaging to any medical appointment if its practical. The NOAH mobile app now allows product details to be shared with medical practitioners effectively.

"If there is a reaction to an animal medicine (in either human or animal) it should be reported to the VMD, as part of its suspected adverse reaction scheme. This will allow greater understanding of the scale of the issues affecting those who use medicines on a regular basis."

Safety information at www.noahcompendium.co.uk. Report a medicine issue at www.gov.uk/report-veterinary-medicine-problem.



Needle-stick injuries are common on livestock farms.



Take the first step



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1. Clements *et al* (2014). *Veterinary Record* 10.1136/vr.102161
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Succession planning in sheep farming: what you can do to ensure clarity

By Joanne Gilding, Roythornes 

Succession planning is the passing down of the farming business to the next generation, or planning for what will happen to the business if there is no obvious successor in place.

Good succession planning provides clarity for the future and prevents misunderstandings and disagreements, which can be costly to resolve. But what can you do to achieve this?

Ensure you have wills in place and they are up to date. It's never too early to put a will in place and, if you own anything in your name, you should have one to set out the position if the worst happened. If you have a partnership agreement in place, you should ensure it ties in with your will, to avoid walking into a situation of confusion.

Contract and share farming agreements. It is often thought that, in order to secure agricultural reliefs, a farmer needs to effectively 'die with their boots on'. This is not always realistic and you may instead consider the use of contract farming and share farming agreements, especially if securing agricultural property relief on the farmhouse is crucial to the plan.

The use of trusts. In situations where there is no obvious successor in place and you do not wish to sell the farm or business, the use of a trust through your will could be beneficial. This can be useful, for example, if you have young grandchildren who may or may not show a future interest in the farm but you would like to preserve the position. This can allow your executors and trustees to effectively act with the benefit of hindsight, as well as the opportunity to speak with the beneficiaries when the time comes and see their preferences.

Trusts can also help with asset protection, which can be important if you are concerned about your successors coming into matrimonial or financial difficulties. While an asset is in a trust, it is not exclusively protected but the position is better than if it were owned by someone outright. There is no perfect solution for this situation, but a trust is a good place to start.

Get a lasting power of attorney (LPA). As we are living longer, we have new challenges to overcome, such as losing capacity. This is not limited to old age. People can lose capacity temporarily or permanently after an accident, for example. LPAs are extremely beneficial, as they allow people appointed by you while you had capacity to make decisions on your behalf. These are as crucial as wills and succession planning schemes.

When succession planning it is essential to think about the following to avoid disputes. Firstly, there needs to be a plan in place and it needs to be thought through well in advance of plan implementation. The plan needs to be well-documented so relevant parties can refer to it when the time comes.

When implementing your plan, you should have tax in mind. There are valuable tax reliefs available to farmers and farming

businesses so it is important for your plan to be properly structured to ensure you can take full advantage of those reliefs.

When considering your plan, ensure a distinction is made between the farm business and the farmland. There is often a difference between the two and you should be clear about this when discussing it with the relevant parties to avoid disagreements.

Succession works best where everyone involved knows the family plan and, where possible, has been involved in its preparation. If there are no surprises, it reduces the chance of disputes.

Where a family member is working on the farm, ensure you are fair and transparent about payment for work. If you are looking to pay them less than the market average, ensure you take proper advice in relation to this.

Where necessary, consider using a third party the family trusts, for example a land agent or industry representative, to act as a facilitator to succession discussions. Using a third party can help unlock some difficult discussions that may ordinarily be overlooked.



Succession planning can help avoid future disputes and costs.



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New service offers personalised support for everyone working in the industry

As part of its role to help farmers develop skills and lifelong learning, the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH) is testing a new online service.

This will connect farmers with training and development opportunities and gain independent recognition for skills and knowledge. Farmers can already access the new service, which is open for testing in order for TIAH to gather feedback, improve and refine the service ahead of a full launch early next year.

TIAH has been established in recognition that, while there are many training opportunities out there, it is not easy to find exactly what is needed in an applicable format, be it a practical course or an online learning module.

Barriers

Research by the institution shows the most common barrier to upskilling or training is a lack of time (or staff time) to go away for training. This is followed by lack of funds or training being too expensive, difficulty finding training providers who can deliver where or when the training is required, and it being hard to find the time to organise it.

The online service has been designed to help individuals identify what would be most beneficial for them – based on their background, experience and the role they have – helping them review their skills, access training and record their achievements along the way.

By registering for the online service, users can upload previous certificates and other training



TIAH's free service offers training identification for individual skill gaps.

records, allowing them to be kept in one place and easily accessible if they are required, for example to demonstrate evidence of training for assurance audits. As the TIAH service develops, it will also be able to notify people if their certificates are expiring or if they are due refresher training.

Careers

While there is a strong focus on supporting and developing the current workforce, be it farm business owners or allied/support staff, TIAH also offers career information to explain the range of opportunity available to new entrants.

Tess Howe of TIAH is pleased with progress to date, but is keen for more people to register. She says: "It's great to see increasing interest as more people sign up. We are receiving a wide

range of feedback around content and usability that is helping to develop and refine the service ahead of launching membership. Many users have told us the service is useful in helping them find training and learning opportunities to build their skills, and to record their CPD in their own personal hub."

Tom Bradshaw, TIAH Board Member, says: "What we have set out to do – deliver a truly bespoke service tailored to sector, training, and skill levels – has never been done before, so there is a lot to do. Our ambition is to not only help those of us who work in the sector, we also want to support the industry while promoting agriculture as a progressive, professional and exciting career choice."

The service is currently free. Try it at www.tiah.org.



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Welsh Sheep Genetics Programme uses recording to improve flock efficiency



Taking the total to 107 flocks, one of 32 new farms recruited to a Farming Connect performance recording project is that of Bryn Hughes and Sarah Carr.

The couple have only been farming the 1,340 acre (540ha) holding since March this year, having relocated from Monmouthshire where they ran a commercial lowland flock.

The environment of the two farms could not be more different but the couple believe genetics holds the key to developing a flock that is well adapted to conditions at Sylfaen, the new unit. A sheep needs to be hardy to thrive in terrain that rises to 50ft (590m).

The flock includes 900 Improved Welsh and Improved Welsh cross Aberfield ewes they acquired with the farm; they also have 200 commercial ewes which relocated with them from Monmouthshire.

Adaptation

"In a hill farm situation, we can't necessarily change the conditions to suit the sheep, so we decided to focus on producing an animal that is better equipped to succeed in this environment, particularly in terms of resilience to disease," explains Miss Carr, who combines farming with her work as a locum vet.

With that ambition, they applied to join the new programme to genetically improve their hill flock through performance recording.

EBVs will be used to improve selected traits, in the couples case to produce a hardier Welsh ewe able to utilise mountain grazing efficiently, lamb outdoors, rear a strong single lamb, and be resilient to disease.

"We have identified quite a few environmental and health challenges for the flock since we moved here. There are large populations of ticks, which carry several tick-borne diseases, as well as fluke and other internal parasites," says Miss Carr.

"By selecting sheep which are genetically better equipped to deal with these challenges, over time we aim to reduce the need for treatments, reducing the risk of drug resistance and the amount of these products entering the environment. Hardiness is a goal too."

The hill flock previously benefitted from additional lowland grazing, allowing the relatively high number of twins to be finished there, but they aim to produce a tougher ewe that can thrive at Sylfaen all year round.

"We need sheep that want to live at the top of the hill, able to efficiently convert rough grazing without going out on tack," says Mr Hughes.

The farm includes 155 acres (63ha) of in-bye pasture and the remainder is rough hill grazing and 'ffridd', the area between the hill and the in-bye land.

Talybont Welsh and Aberfield rams were used previously but this year they will use a hardy Welsh Mountain-type. Rams coming to Sylfaen in autumn will have EBVs and be bred locally with prior exposure and, therefore, immunity to ticks.

They also aim to reduce the number of twins in the March-lambing hill flock, reducing the scanning rate to 115%, and producing a lamb of 32kg liveweight at slaughter.

Ahead of tupping, ewes will be gathered, and 200 will be selected to be DNA genotyped, weight recorded and condition scored to form the nucleus flock of performance recorded ewes.

DNA genotyping the offspring next year will then provide the information the couple need to decide which rams and ewes produce the offspring most suited to Sylfaen.

Flock performance

"We are not interested in individual performance but in flock performance," Miss Carr explains.

"Keeping an efficient flock should be the ambition of every sheep farmer, but there are many definitions of efficiency. For us, it means having sheep able to succeed in their environment with less intervention."

Reducing ewe and lamb losses will also reduce the flock's environmental impact, she adds. "Diseases and losses massively increase that impact. The most efficient farm is one that rears healthy animals," Miss Carr explains.

Recruitment of 32 new flocks into each of the two tiers, and 40 flocks involved in the predecessor Hill Ram Scheme, are now a part of the new Farming Connect Programme.

Tier one is specific to hill and upland breeds while tier two is for specific breeds including the Bluefaced Leicester, Lley, Charmoise Hill and Romney.

Gwawr Williams of Farming Connect says farmers are increasingly realising the benefits of improving their flock through genetics.

Participating flocks will benefit from financial support for data collection, advice and guidance on setting achievable targets for flock improvements, opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding of different topics impacting genetic progress, and an opportunity to be involved in innovative research.

"Each flock will have a breeding action plan, a dynamic working document that will follow the flock through the project," says Mrs Williams.

"We are gathering initial key performance indicators and information on participating flocks, and will identify areas for improvement to focus on genetically, but also areas that may impact genetic progress such as underlying health issues, and help farmers to improve on these for maximum benefit."



Genetic recording has helped streamline the couple's flock.

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Compaction can occur if areas are grazed during wet periods.

Aiding soil management and protection through a farm specific soil map

By Elizabeth Stockdale, NIAB



This autumn it's worth setting aside some time to review soil health to make a plan to optimise soil fertility and future resilience.

Soil is one of the most important assets farmers have. Growing grass and forage crops requires soils to be maintained so they have good soil structure, water retention and nutrient availability. Healthy soils have optimised interactions

between chemistry (pH, nutrients), physics (soil structure and water balance) and biology (earthworms, microbes, plant roots), enabling plant growth.

Where soil structure is frequently poor this will lead to a 10-20% reduction in grass growth, equating to around 1-2t DM/ha. Poor structure can lead to reduced quality forage with reduced ryegrass and clover content and more weeds. A sward with 70% ryegrass will average more than 11.5ME, more than 1MJ higher than a sward dominated by weed grasses. This reduction in quality can reduce liveweight gain significantly.

Liveweight gain

With good soil condition coupled to excellent grazing management, a lamb can gain 300g/day. But, lambs often gain only 170g/day from pasture. Soil structural limitations may be one reason for poor yields or forage quality even where pH and nutrient availability is apparently optimum – if roots can't reach the nutrients the grass can't use them.

The first step is to draw a map of the soils you have. This doesn't have to be fancy or even use technical terms. For example, identifying the stony steep bits and the places which get soggy after a week's rain is adequate. Print out a farm map, then look at it alongside satellite images and apply personal knowledge of land behaviour to colour code areas of similarly. Note

any sensitive features, like historic features, watercourses or wildlife habitats.

For most farms, a list of soils usually has five to 10 groupings. In a soil scientist's map, you'll see reference to soil types (these have big differences between them) and soil series (these may be of different types, but can also be only slightly different to another series – for example based on a small difference in stoniness or topsoil depth).

Your own map doesn't need to use these terms, it can stick with your own descriptions but it can be used as the heart of your soil management plan. For each soil you have identified, keep some notes on slope, soil texture (light, medium, heavy) and what you have observed about water run-off after heavy rain and/or soil movement through erosion. The risks of run-off and erosion are increased if the soil surface is bare, so the map should inform planning if you are thinking of how and where best to integrate arable forages and the best approaches for reseeding.

Soil health

Once you have a map, you can also think about linking this to a programme of soil health assessment. This brings together measurements of the soil chemistry from soil samples with in-field assessment of soil structure and biology. The ideal time to do the soil health check-up is when the soil is warm and moist, so either

from mid-autumn or as the soil warms up in the spring. Whichever timing you choose stick with it to compare like with like, year to year. Identify 20-30 areas that will give you a picture of the soil groups and management practices on farm.

Soil properties change slowly, meaning you don't need to sample each site every year – about once in five years is fine – unless you are making a major management change. This means you have five sites on your list to look at in detail each year. When I say in detail, you only need about half an hour to get a good look and take reference photos.

Updating your soil management plan regularly with extra notes based on observations is a good idea. You might note an area where compaction has occurred around a ring feeder or pick out an area where grass growth has been better (or worse) than expected. In these areas, you might want to slot in an extra sample during the health check to aid understanding.

Assessments

A spade is the key tool for carrying out soil assessments. Digging a hole and handling the topsoil and subsoil to identify soil texture (light, medium, heavy), structure, compaction and earthworm activity provides essential information to guide future management. These tests are

known as a visual evaluation of soil structure (VESS). If you couple this with soil sampling, you can also check whether the nutrient management plan you have is doing its job in terms of maintaining pH, preventing acidity and addressing shortfalls and surpluses in key nutrients.

If any nutrients are in short supply, plant development will be compromised and overall yield disappointing. This routine soil health check can help direct other more focussed soil testing to aid decisions on additional nutrients applications, allowing a targeted approach to manure and fertiliser use, saving time and money.

Implementation

It's also important to link the map and any assessments to a 'to do' list. The best time for action depends on the problem; in many cases, what's needed is patience and perhaps some fencing to let the sward and soil recover together overwinter. Active growing roots are the best way to maintain good soil structure. In some cases, metal might be needed to address severe compaction, but this needs to be done when the target layer is dry enough to fracture. Structuring operations can smear the soil and do more harm than good when done in the wrong conditions.



Conducting VESS helps understand soil health.

Always try and follow a restructuring operation with an application of well-composted muck.

Maintaining healthy grassland soils, by improving soil structure and conserving biological activity, will support better plant growth, forage quality and thus profits – and will also minimise the negative impacts on the environment which can follow poor soil management.

More UK Soil Health Initiative information at www.cfeonline.org.uk/environmental-management/uk-soil-health-initiative-guides/

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Forage options for improving lamb growth rates post-weaning

By Dr Liz Genever, independent sheep consultant

Now is a great opportunity to review how well lambs did this summer and autumn.

Target growth rates for weaned lambs should be more than 250g/day, if pasture quantity, parasites and trace elements are managed appropriately. Monitoring growth rates alongside faecal egg counts will help to monitor for parasite challenge. If you are concerned about trace element deficiency it might be worth blood testing.

When possible, lambs should be allowed to select the best bits of grazing and move on without having to hit residuals to maximise their growth rates. Another class of stock, such as lean weaned ewes, replacements or cows and calves, should be used to tidy up the pastures following the priority animals. This also helps to reduce parasite challenge as they are not being asked to eat to the bottom of the sward where most larvae are found.

Grass swards

Perennial ryegrass and white clover are versatile grass species, but they cannot always be relied upon. Factors such as previous nitrogen use, soil type, soil structure, organic matter levels and previous grazing management all affect quality and quantity available. For example, worse-case scenario is light soil types with low historical nitrogen use and very tight grazing.

Many are investigating the role of mixed species swards including chicory, plantain, yarrow, red clover, lucerne, birdsfoot trefoil and sainfoin. Common themes here are rooting depth and root reserves, and the enhanced water use

efficiency of legumes enabling them to grow well from mid-summer to drive lamb performance post-weaning.

Including these species when considering re-designing your leys will help mitigate against future changing weather patterns.

Government incentives for options of legume and herb-rich swards offer financial help to trial a range of species and understand which work for your farm and farming system. However, some



Government schemes could be used to test out new forage options.

have reported persistency issues with certain herbs and other species within these mixes, especially if the swards are over-grazed with sheep or not rotationally grazed.

Some are trying high clover and herb mixes, for example red and white clovers, with chicory and plantain and no grass, as a specialist crop. Drilled on a small proportion of the farm it could be used for grazing triplet-bearing ewes or twin-bearing

ewe lambs or shearlings post-lambing, and then used for weaned lambs.

Its growth period is almost at an end (April to October), with limited opportunity for winter grazing due to the lack of grass. However, it will have provided a good supply of forage through those months of growth and will be more resilient to variable rainfall. It needs to be rotationally grazed and would last up to four years.

Lucerne

Lucerne is another crop of interest after recent dry summers. It can be used to produce two or three crops of high protein silage with some aftermath grazing. A recent field lab investigated grazing lucerne with sheep from late pregnancy through the growing season.

Lamb growth rates were good, with the crop supporting more than 850kg of liveweight per hectare. However, it needs careful management with grazing starting at 30cm down to around 8cm, and salt and fibre must be consistently available. It needs to be rotationally grazed and should last four years if managed well.

There are a range of plants available to enhance a farm's resilience and lamb growth rates. This means farmers can select from a range of options to understand which ones work best on their farms. These challenging seasons will continue, and it may be an opportunity to try more radical options in the future.



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

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TECHNICAL

Flock biosecurity advice to prevent the introduction and spread of disease

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun 

Biosecurity is an important tool in safeguarding your flock from exposure to avoidable disease risks.

It is a critically important part of disease prevention and control and should be continually addressed as part of any farm management. As livestock farms strive towards net zero, improving biosecurity on your farm will prevent disease, increase production efficiency, reduce waste and greenhouse gases, increase profitability, and improve animal health and welfare.

Biosecurity not only protects your flock but protects you. Several livestock diseases are known to be zoonotic, leading to increased risk to public and environmental health. Therefore, improving biosecurity also helps reduce disease transmission.

With antimicrobial and anthelmintic resistance also on the rise, good biosecurity practice is key to a one health solution, where both livestock and public health are protected. Zoonotic pathogens may be transmitted between livestock and people and some pathogens can cause disease in both animals and people, while others may be more of a public health risk, for example food and water-borne pathogens. Application of targeted biosecurity interventions will help to reduce pathogen transmission and protect animal, public and environmental health.

Reducing risks

Adopting a closed flock policy helps reduce the risks associated with incoming stock but this isn't always possible. If you do buy in livestock always aim to purchase animals accredited under a recognised health scheme or at least know the disease status of the vendors' flock. Try to purchase directly from individual flocks and move animals directly from the farm of origin to their new premises in your own transporter. This helps reduce disease risk from external sources.

Biosecurity practices should be applied not only to newly purchased livestock but to returning stock from overwintering or summer grazing. These animals have been off-farm and potentially mixing with animals from other holdings or wildlife that could carry disease. On arrival at your farm, always ensure incoming stock undergo an adequate period of quarantine in secure accommodation before introduction to your existing animals.



Isolating stock away from the home flock prevents disease transmission.

Check the quarantine period for the diseases you are trying to prevent, as there are different recommended quarantine times for different diseases. Never mix animals together without considering the possible disease risks. For most of the key diseases it is crucial you isolate rather than separate incoming stock from the home flock as separation may still allow disease exposure. A disinfectant footbath, brush and separate overclothes should be provided at the entrance to the quarantine building. Quarantined animals should be fed, watered and inspected last, followed by handwashing where possible.

There are also steps you can take in the home flock to reduce disease risk. Diagnosis is critical to effective disease control and many key diseases have sensitive diagnostic tests and/or preventative vaccines available. Any testing and vaccination programmes are best discussed with your vet and included in interactive and dynamic health plans to ensure timely and accurate application. Interactive health plans are crucial and allow both vet, adviser/s and farmer to work remotely on the same document ensuring regular updating and checking.

Testing

Check and test animals for disease and treat if necessary, including newly purchased stock. Quarantine treatments have an economic benefit as any required treatments are confined to a small group of animals rather than a whole flock.

Good environmental hygiene, such as clean, disinfected premises, equipment and personnel,

are very important in the prevention and control of disease. Different diseases may require particular disinfectants, therefore it is important you select the correct one. Poor hygiene and environmental conditions lead to increased risk of infection. Strive to improve standards in animal buildings and in feed storage areas. This will also discourage pests.

You should aim to develop proactive strategies for disease prevention rather than adopting a reactive approach. Discuss the development of health plans, disease surveillance programmes and disease response strategies with your vet on a regular basis.

Finally, don't forget farm security – it is critical for disease control. Examine ways in which you can improve farm security to prevent animals or people from inadvertently bringing diseases in. Focus on farm boundaries such as fencing, farm entry and exit points and farm buildings.

Online resources

All NSA members are also Moredun associate members, meaning you can access disease fact sheets, webinars and other resources via the Moredun online portal. Go to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-moredun. Moredun will shortly be releasing an updated biosecurity fact sheet which can be used as part of an animal health plan to reduce or prevent disease burden.



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Aim for optimal condition of ewes pre-tupping to reduce infertility risks.

A vet's perspective on preparing your ewes for tupping

By Claire Neillans and Emili Canavan-Hicks, Black Sheep Farm Health Vets



Tupping is a key time of year that directly impacts production and therefore efficiency and profitability.

There are many key performance indicators (KPIs) influenced by management around this time, including scanning and rearing percentage, barren percentage and body condition score. These KPIs give a valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of your flock and make a great starting place for a discussion with your vet. The Animal Health & Welfare Pathway in England is another opportunity to facilitate discussion, with funding available for a vet visit and worming treatment check. Similar schemes are emerging in the devolved nations.

Ewe nutrition

Ewe nutrition is fundamental to performance in all stages of the production cycle, but particularly from weaning to tupping. Body condition score (BCS) is important for fertility and optimal ovulation rates, with BCS of the ewe determining not only the number of lambs, but also lamb weaning weight. Undernutrition is associated with high embryonic loss and over feeding is associated with reduced foetal survival due to the suppression of progesterone, the hormone that maintains pregnancy.

For these reasons, BCS is a key management tool and should be done at intervals through the year. At weaning, it should be used to group ewes to allow optimum body condition to be reached prior to tupping. Remember BCS isn't about average or the majority of animals being in the target, but ensuring individual animals are within target.

Flushing, the practice of increasing protein and energy in the diet prior to tupping, is used as a method of increasing scanning percentage. This practice has its limitations but is often used as a short term fix to increase

the prolificacy of ewes in poorer body condition. Care should be taken to ensure ewes are in correct body condition before lambing to avoid metabolic disease and death.

Red clover

Another discussion at tupping time is the impact of red clover on fertility, with many avoiding red clover grazing in the 45 days pre-tupping. A recent Adas-led study found ewes grazed on leys with low percentages of red clover had a higher scanning percentage than ewes grazed on non-red

clover leys, demonstrating no adverse effect on ewe fertility. Greater confidence in and integration of red clover into grazing has the potential to have economic and environmental benefits, reducing input costs and carbon footprint, as well as improving the sustainability of the enterprise.

Many trace elements are essential to production, with cobalt, selenium, iodine and copper all being important for fertility, immunity and foetal development. Trace element supplementation is important but should be based on diagnostic monitoring; farm history, blood, liver and forage samples are all key pieces of information. Prior to tupping is an ideal time to test animals for trace element deficiencies, as often ewes are not receiving any additional

feeding so results are more likely to give a true indication of the farm status.

Ideally six animals should be sampled per management group or per breed on farm. It is important bloods are taken within four hours of gathering, as cobalt levels rise artificially after removal from feeding, so arrange the visit for the start of the day where possible. There are many options for supplementation. In ewes we'd recommend bolusing as this gives adequate cover for both tupping and lambing.



Pre-tupping is a good time to get on top of flock health.

Other options are available such as injectables or drenches. It is important to consult your vet about which boluses are sufficiently well evidenced as they are considered supplemental feedstuffs rather than medicinal products and, therefore, are largely unregulated.

Vaccinations

Abortion vaccines against enzootic abortion (EAE) and toxoplasmosis are an important insurance policy for a flock and considered category one vaccines in the National Office of Animal Health livestock vaccination guidelines. There is rarely justification for breeding ewes not to be EAE vaccinated, as this would require the flock to be fully closed without sheep neighbours. More flocks will be able to justify not using toxoplasmosis vaccine, but these flocks should regularly screen barren ewes and abortions in order to identify problems early.

Another category one vaccination to consider pre-tupping is a footrot vaccine, which should be given at least six weeks before tupping due to the potential impact on fertility or, where this is not possible, left until scanning time.

Parasite treatments should also be considered. Worming adult sheep should not be routinely practised, with only lean or young ewes wormed pre-tupping. The exception to this is where haemonchus is an issue, but this treatment should be selective and based on FAMACHA scoring.

Fluke treatments are important for acute fluke. To avoid unnecessary use of triclabendazole, blood testing of lambs should be considered to assess risk, particularly in dry, low risk years. It is, however, important that lambs have been running with ewes so the results can accurately reflect the risk.

Adult rumen fluke is rarely pathogenic but might be something to look at. On hill farms where rumen fluke has been diagnosed, increased scanning rates have been observed when treated with oxcylozanide pre-tupping. Fluke egg counts will pick up rumen fluke eggs if they are present, but speak to your vet or adviser about test interpretation.

Ewe screening

Thin ewes that have failed to gain weight after tupping should be investigated, tying this in with a visit for trace element testing. The diseases that should be considered in these animals include Johne's, madiea visna and ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma, with testing carried out on either blood sampling or by post mortem examination.

After scanning, barren ewes are another useful opportunity to gather information about your flock. Apart from some upland flocks, a barren rate of more than 2% should be further investigated. In flocks that do not use abortion vaccines, screening should take place for toxoplasmosis and EAE if increased barren rates are observed; there are often options for free or subsidised testing for these. Other considerations for increased barren rates include nutrition, fluke, ticks, Border disease, campylobacter and Johne's disease.

Tupping is an important time of year and involving your vet at this time can help to ensure optimal outcomes at scanning and lambing. Reflecting on flock performance over the previous year enables appropriate changes to be made to work towards a sustainable flock.



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New foot health campaign launched to emphasise and promote good practice

By Fiona Lovatt and Phillipa Page, Flock Health 

The topic of lameness in sheep flocks remains high up on the agenda, whether you are maintaining low levels of lameness, dealing with a sudden increase or are trying to reduce stubbornly high levels.

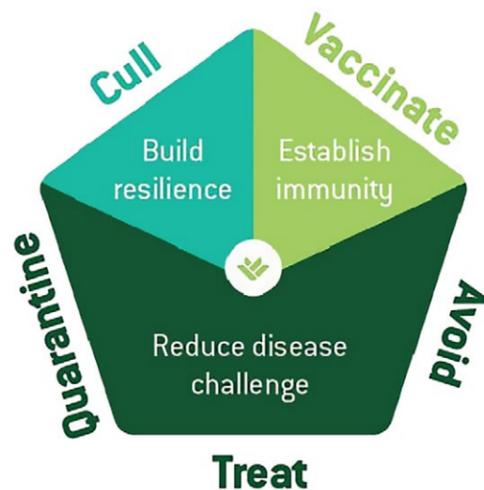
September saw the launch of the collaborative cross-industry #healthyfeethappysheep campaign, designed to help both vets and farmers look at how they approach lameness on farm. It will also promote how they can constructively work together to develop a flock-specific plan to reduce sheep lameness, to use medicines more responsibly and to sustainably improve both the profitability and productivity of flocks for the future.

Adverse effects

The effects of having lame sheep in your flock are widely known. Lameness is painful so affected sheep will move less and graze less to avoid discomfort. As a result, flock performance is reduced in terms of poorer body condition score, reduced ability to get in lamb and poorer quality colostrum and milk to rear lambs.

Perhaps less obvious, though no less serious, are the consequences of an individual lame ewe

on the rest of the flock. A lame ewe spreads infection in every footstep. The longer it remains untreated, the greater the risk to the flock. At every gathering or handling event, every lame sheep increases the risk of infection spreading to the other sheep.



Neither shepherds nor sheep farmers like to see lame sheep and quite rightly feel frustration at the additional hassle and the increased risk of other consequences, such as flystrike. The treatment and management of lameness adds extra costs and labour to an already busy schedule of tasks, and it is also known to be the predominant driver

of antibiotic use in the sheep sector.

There is plenty of evidence to indicate that, once lame with either footrot or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), it is essential an effective treatment of an injectable antibiotic is administered to all clinically lame sheep as quickly as possible. However, the aim must be to prevent lameness happening in the first place and to do this we can apply plan-prevent-protect principles, key areas vets and farmers are encouraged to concentrate on in the #healthyfeethappysheep campaign.

- **Plan ahead.** Get a diagnosis, undertake a farm-specific risk assessment and use the five point plan (see left) to control lameness.
- **Prevent disease.** Avoid the spread of disease and avoid buying in either CODD or a new strain of footrot through effective quarantine and removing the risk of clinical disease by treating lame sheep effectively and culling when necessary.
- **Protect the flock.** Vaccinate against footrot and breed in lameness resilience, which means culling out persistently lame sheep and not retaining their daughters.

Visit bit.ly/healthyfeethappysheep and plan some time with your vet to discuss the prevention and control of lameness in your flock.



Lame sheep risk spreading infection within the flock.

Lameness control: Welsh case study

Flock Health worked with 42 Welsh farmers on the HCC Stoc+ scheme last winter. Farmers attended an on-farm practical technical lameness workshop and worked closely with the vets to create flock-specific lameness plans and monitor progress.

Between September and February, a staggering improvement in lameness was reported, with average levels reducing from 5% to 2% in both ewes and lambs. Participating farms commented how much more confident they felt in their use of antibiotics and the costs involved as well as the relief they felt to have lameness under better control.

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Continued data collection allows year on year comparison.

Recording and understanding data can drive flock health improvements

Health and performance data – when collected and used correctly – can help drive improvements in flock productivity and profitability.

Sheep farmers are being encouraged to take the time to record and interpret flock health and performance data alongside their farm advisers and vets.

Matt Colston of Elanco Animal Health says the correct use of data can be hugely beneficial to a sheep enterprise.

“Optimal sheep health, production and profitability goes hand-in-hand with dynamic and adaptable flock health planning,” he says.

“By using flock data and measuring key performance indicators (KPIs) at appropriate times, farmers can improve overall flock health and productivity, and measure the outcomes of interventions to promote more efficient sheep production.”

Mr Colston says this is especially important against the backdrop of changing farm support schemes.

“Going forward, sheep farmers will have to target resources – both labour and materials – more carefully to minimise any unnecessary or less productive interventions,” he adds.

“Integrating sheep into other agricultural businesses, for example, as part of the arable rotation, and taking advantage of the changing environmental support schemes will also be a necessary consideration for most sheep businesses.”

Flock data

The concept of recording data can be daunting but Mr Colston says most farmers are already keeping track of some form of flock data – whether that be to fulfil statutory record-keeping requirements or gathering the information required to be part of a farm assurance scheme.

“Recording data need not be a difficult or overly time-consuming task,” he adds.

“As a starting point, farmers can focus on their flock inventory, any records for sales or movements of animals to or from

the farm, and any scanning or lambing figures.”

He says this data can be used to establish the current flock status and a baseline – against which KPIs can be measured.

“KPIs are measurements of performance – either physical or financial – and although these measures are often used to compare performance between similar flocks (and can give a useful performance target), the focus should always be on each farm improving on previous years,” explains Mr Colston.

Continued overleaf.



Taking regular lamb weights helps identify potential forage and health issues.

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Once a baseline has been established, there are countless data points farmers can collect about their flock. However, focusing on the parameters that will drive the production targets of the flock keep this to a manageable level. These key measures will vary depending on the type of enterprise and production goals.

"Data can be collected in many ways – from pen and paper to app-based systems – however the key is comparing data that gives a like for like comparison from year to year and looking at the big picture with your flock adviser and vet, to understand where any management interventions could improve any potential health or nutrition issues," says Mr Colston.

Industry targets

"Comparisons with industry targets can also be useful to highlight any potential for improvement, and where investing time and resources might give the best returns; you can then set targets for what you want to achieve in the flock.

"For example, should reducing the empty at scanning numbers be the focus this year or should you be aiming to minimise lambs lost from scanning to sale?"

Once data has been collected and any problems identified, this could be used to create an action plan for improvements.

"Aside from the key data collection areas mentioned, there's a range of other areas you can gather data on – including ewe body condition score and lamb growth rates," says Mr Colston.

"Data is especially important when it comes to worming strategies, and the regular use of faecal egg counts can inform whether a wormer is needed, and guide the timing and choice of wormer treatment required.

"Likewise, having the most accurate data available on weights will quickly highlight if lambs aren't growing as expected and allow an early check on the quality and quantity of feed available and/or whether parasites could be better controlled."

He says this careful attention to detail is key to helping slow wormer resistance on farms and ensuring anthelmintics are as effective as possible for as long as possible.

"In all instances, regardless of what data is being collected, the most important thing is to use the information and see how it can help drive your sheep enterprise forward," adds Mr Colston.

"This is where your vet and other farm advisers come in – by working together you can pinpoint any problem areas that are preventing the flock from reaching its potential, and work on ways to tackle these."



Using industry targets and discussing data with vets/advisers will aid positive change.



Establishing baseline data is key to making improvements.

Useful data to record

Each farm will differ in the detail of what they can or should record, but Mr Colston recommends focusing on the following areas as a starting point:

- 1. Scanning results.** These should always be calculated over the total number of females put to the tup (don't ignore losses between tupping and scanning). Empty ewes are never good, and averages can hide a problem. For example, if the target is two lambs per ewe, 50% singles and 50% triplets gives two lambs per ewe but is still a problem.
- 2. Lamb sales.** How many have you sold, when and at what weight? In the absence of regular weight checks, this will give a measure of growth rates to compare with previous years. The more weight checks recorded, the easier it is to pinpoint the cause of any problems. The main number here is how many are sold and looking at how this compares with scanning results. Can you keep the difference to less than 10%, and do you know where the missing lambs have gone?

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Following the flock

We visit Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire and Suffolk to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Matt Bagley

NSA Central Region Chair, Lincolnshire



After a challenging start for this year's lambs with endless rain and cold, they have gone on to grow well.

Land did start to go dry in early June but we've since had an abundance of grass due to large amounts of rain. The majority of lambs have been sold deadweight this year to enable us to get their killing out data. We are nearing the end of lambs now with final ones kept back for our lamb boxes to sell locally.



The ewes have recovered well this summer and are now batched into groups, with the tups just going in as you read this. We plan to single serve with tups again this year to carry on building productivity data for the tups and ewes that follows lambs from birth to slaughter. Once all lambs have been sold we can begin looking at data.

The cover crops are establishing ready for the NSA Central Region Field Day we will be hosting here in late autumn. [See page 4 for details.](#)



Dan Phipps

National and Eastern Region Chair, Suffolk



The old cliché is the older you get the faster the years go, and I'm sure as a farmer that's truer still.

It's always that way with the next seasonal deadline steaming towards you meaning time goes ever faster. It feels like early September we had only just finished lambing, yet already had 1,000 ewes in-lamb or raddle marked. The unpredictability of what your challenges will be has always been there, but the variations appear to make them more marked be it weather or war.

Last summer had hardly a blade of grass through drought to this year having hardly a dry day through July and August. One thing that doesn't change is that what's bad for one is a gift for another. Great if you were selling wheat, not so good when buying fertiliser or concentrate. Great if you are trying to get root crops in for winter grazing, not so good if you're trying to harvest to make way to get the root crop in.

The future lies in the hands of the next generation. Having held the NSA Eastern Region Next Generation event here in conjunction with the NSA AGM, with thanks to many and varied, my partner Lynne and I packed off on holiday where we were disappointed to discover that time goes even faster in France!



David Barber

NSA South East Region Committee Member, Oxfordshire



Things here at Warborough Farm have changed massively over the last year as the farm and intensive early lambing flock were sold after the passing of the previous owner.

With the new owners the decision was made to start a new flock to make best use of the grazing we have. As most is north facing chalk downland, which can be slow to get growing in the spring, we have opted for an outdoor, low input, May-lambing system that should provide good quality grass pre and post-lambing. The breed choice has been New Zealand Romneys with rams sourced from Cornwall and bred for worm resilience. We are aware we have some resistance on the farm and that need to find a system less reliant on anthelmintics.

Sheep have been managed in one group following lambing. We have tried to paddock graze them with the intention of improving our sward quality in a regenerative manner and are already seeing more clover. The plan is to increase the flock size this year and we have bought more ewes. We will become a closed flock, buying only rams and selecting for sheep resilient to worms and that do well on our type of land in our management system.

Lack of numbers this year has meant we had to make 130 acres (52ha) of hay on our wildflower meadows. July was not the month to do this as we never had more than a couple of dry days. We eventually cut in August with the last acre being baled in a rain shower. I hope someone wants some hay to feed in their fields to introduce wildflower seeds – it might even be worth a premium?



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