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A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

DISEASE OUTBREAK UPDATES

SCHMALLENBERG AND BLUETONGUE

NSA NEXT GENERATION

MEET THIS YEAR'S SELECTED AMBASSADORS

NEW NSA CHAIR

PETER DELBRIDGE LEADS THE FLOCK



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Stay positive and focus on the good



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

By now some will have finished lambing, others will be about to start, and some may have the pleasure of another issue of *Sheep Farmer* to while away the waiting weeks.

This is a crucial time of the year in the sheep farming calendar that shows the results of the management of previous months and is an indication of the season ahead. Wherever you fit I wish you the very best of lambing seasons and hope you can keep your sheep fit and healthy.

Even more important is to keep yourself fit, healthy and in a good state of mind. It's not always easy at one of the most stressful times of the year but critically important. This was brought home to us in the New Year when we received news one of our Next Generation Ambassadors had lost his life to suicide – an event that was seemingly unexpected.

Sadly, cases like this are far too regular. Tragic decisions taken out of despair, with the devastation for family and friends lingering long after the victim's pain is over.

I know it can be hard to seek help, but reach out if you feel you are struggling. And likewise, let's all keep an eye on each other and highlight any concerns.

Bluetongue

With incessant rain and severe flooding causing problems for some, the least we needed was the news bluetongue (specifically BTV-3) had arrived in the UK. Until recently bluetongue had been restricted to countries nearer the equator. Experience in the Netherlands raises serious productivity and welfare concerns, particularly in sheep. It's not yet clear just how it arrived there in August, spreading to Belgium and Germany later in the autumn.

Despite all the active surveillance undertaken, stringent import conditions and more, it's been a waiting game for its likely arrival from virus carrying midges getting blown onto our shores.

The bad news is it is here and there is no vaccine or likelihood of one any time soon.

While nothing could be done to prevent its arrival, there is a huge effort to prevent it circulating in the UK, spreading beyond the counties in the front line.

Defra and APHA often get criticism in events like this, but they have a tough job to do, not just in the practical tasks of surveillance and licensing moves from within control zones, but also in hitting the right balance of controls and restrictions while enabling trade and movements of stock that need to go to slaughter or be moved on welfare grounds.

Surveillance

With colder temperatures slowing midge activity the hope is things will quieten down. But focused surveillance and testing will continue and we expect more positive cases identified. The aim is eradication and to avoid circulation - the more successful this is, the less we expect things to flare up again in the spring.

We will be at risk from further midge incursions blowing over the channel and can expect a race between a vaccine being produced and licensed, and a high risk outbreak situation. There is of course always the chance things simply die away and bluetongue doesn't emerge as a serious threat, but we would be foolish to rely on this without protecting ourselves.

If bluetongue isn't enough, Schmallenberg cases are undoubtedly on the rise. This was picked up initially by a significant increase in positive tests of sheep donating germplasm for export - backed up by APHA findings - and scanning and field reports of foetal deformities.

With bluetongue and Schmallenberg potentially resulting in similar foetal abnormalities it's even more important suspect cases are reported to your vet, taking advice on lab analysis and diagnosis. As an industry we need to know what we are dealing with as you can't manage what you don't know.

Finally with these threats hanging over us it is even more important we do all we can through good management, biosecurity, nutrition and vaccination programmes to promote general health and reduce disease.



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NSA welcomes new Chair

NSA is pleased to announce Devon sheep farmer Peter Delbridge as its new Chair.

Peter was elected at the January NSA Board Meeting and moves into a term of three years in the role. He takes on the position from Suffolk sheep farmer Dan Phipps, who has come to the end of his fixed three-year term.

Phil Stocker comments: "As the chairmanship passes into the very reliable hands of Peter Delbridge, it is only right to extend our sincere thanks to Dan Phipps for his devotion to this role over the past three years. Dan has worked incredibly hard to represent NSA during three, at times, uncertain years for the UK sheep sector. The challenges our sector faces do not make for an easy ride, with an incredible amount of activity required of the NSA Chair. Dan embraced this challenge just as we are certain Peter will." *More from Pete on pages 6-7 and from Dan on page 26.*



Peter is looking forward to taking on the role.

Mastitis project looks to farms for samples

NSA is pleased to see the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) Small Ruminant Expert Group undertaking a suckler ewe mastitis bacteriology project.

The aim is to improve surveillance of mastitis-causing bacteria in suckler ewes and provide antimicrobial resistance data. Flocks experiencing cases of mastitis can ask their vets to submit milk samples to the project. Farms can submit up to three samples from each lambing cohort of ewes/ewe lambs throughout the lambing season up until May 2024.

Samples will need to be collected aseptically (please request a protocol if required) and sent to APHA Starcross or APHA Penrith clearly stating they are for the suckler ewe mastitis project. *Find an APHA3 small ruminant submission form at www.gov.uk/animal-disease-testing.*



Submitting samples increases surveillance and understanding.

NSA drives action on sheep worrying

NSA will once again highlight the plight of sheep farmers affected by the serious issue of sheep worrying by dogs.

Activity to improve awareness of the topic will intensify this spring in the NSA annual sheep worrying campaign.

Launching this Easter, the campaign is timed to coincide with the commonly experienced peak in attacks on livestock as members of the public venture out and about with increased time off work, improved weather and increased daylength.

The campaign will include informative webinars and videos offering farmers advice on how to deal with sheep worrying cases, including an update on the police responses to attacks. Members are encouraged to look out for further details on sheep worrying activity in NSA communications.



NSA will once again highlight the issue of sheep worrying.

Webinars share advice ahead of lambing

NSA webinars have provided timely advice from industry experts, including leading sheep vet Fiona Lovatt passing on top tips for the coming lambing season.

Other well attended webinars continue to keep the nation's sheep farmers up to date on the latest concerning news of the ongoing bluetongue outbreak and the emerging concerns regarding Schmallenberg. If you've missed out, check out the impressive NSA library of more than 90 webinars available online. *Watch back at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.*



Win a livestock trailer in the NSA 2024 prize draw.

NSA and Nugent team up for prize giveaway

For the third year running, NSA is excited to offer UK sheep farmers the chance to win a new, modern piece of kit to ease the efficient running of their enterprises.

NSA's latest prize draw sees the association team up with renowned trailer specialist Nugent Engineering to give away a fantastic 12ft livestock trailer to one lucky winner. *Find out more about how to enter now on page 8.*

Get ready for another busy year with NSA!

As we enter 2024, there's no doubt it is set to be another busy year for NSA with the return of NSA Scot Sheep and the flagship NSA Sheep Event, sure to be highlights of this summer.

Ahead of these two major events NSA is busy planning a packed schedule of NSA Next Generation workshops following on from the success of these in 2023, and supporting NSA regions in delivery of a fantastic array of farm walks, discussion evenings, industry visits and more for members to enjoy. *Details of this year's shows on page 10 and other NSA activities at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.*

Get the latest NSA news straight to your inbox

In efforts to keep NSA members as up to date as possible with the latest industry news, NSA activities and opportunities, it is urging anyone who has not already registered an email address with Head Office to get in touch.

By providing NSA with an email address, as well as gaining easier and more regular information on what NSA activities are planned for your region, members will receive one of the most valued benefits of NSA membership – the Weekly Email Update. It is sent exclusively to NSA members every Friday afternoon, containing real-time information on the sheep sector. Don't miss out. Call or email Head Office today. *Contacts on page 1.*

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Prepare for UK Sheep Scab Strategy launch

NSA has been working alongside the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group and Moredun to develop a long-term sheep scab strategy with goals set out as far as 2030.

This comes off the back of the success and learnings of the RDPE-funded For Flocks Sake project in England, the All-Wales Sheep Scab Eradication Project, the Scottish Sheep Scab Initiative and the Northern Ireland Sheep Scab control group. The sheep scab strategy is in the process of gaining support at key levels, including veterinary leads in all UK nations, and has ambition to:

- Agree a common strategy for sheep scab control to encompass the whole of the UK.
- Utilise this to reduce the incidence of sheep scab to a low level, with hundreds rather than thousands of outbreaks per annum.
- Implement a coordinated, community-based strategy across hot-spot areas using the Elisa blood test to identify cases and target effective treatments on affected farms.

A key element of this strategy is to lay the foundations for a new sheep scab vaccine, currently under development by Moredun with funding from the Scottish Government.

NSA urges all members to treat sheep scab and maintain good levels of biosecurity across farm enterprises following SCOPS guidelines available at www.scops.org.uk.



More details are emerging on a UK sheep scab strategy.

Reminder veterinary attestations now in force

NSA is reminding all sheep farming members to undergo a vet attestation, and gain a vet attestation number (VAN) unless they are sure the outlets they sell to don't require one – and these will be extremely limited.

The requirement for an annual vet attestation for farms came in force in December 2023 and requires an on-farm check by your vet for a satisfactory level of being 'disease free' and working to a level of biosecurity required to export products to the EU.

It is advisable to speak with your vet about conducting the attestation during any routine vet visits. In England the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway review visit satisfies the requirement although a specific VAN must be obtained and used on the revised AML1 movement forms to accompany stock to slaughter.

Membership of the main national assurance schemes (ran by Red Tractor, Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers, QMS and, recently added, RSPCA) qualify as being compliant without the need for a standalone vet visit.

NSA continues to receive questions on vet attestations, but please be aware this regulation is active and the vast majority of abattoirs and auction marts will require stock for slaughter with a VAN, including lambs and older sheep. Not undertaking a veterinary attestation could risk animals being turned away at the point of slaughter. This rule applies to any animal destined for slaughter from its final holding. *More detail on VANs and movement databases on page 32.*



NSA warns against ignoring vet attestation requirements.

Farming schemes continue to develop in 2024

NSA is pleased to see Defra has made progress with the agriculture transition and future farm support mechanisms.

The objective, particularly via the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), is for food production to go hand in hand with improving the environment.

During January 2024 further actions were announced and UK farmers have continued to sign up. Takeaway messages from the recent announcement include:

- An average payment rate increase of 10% for SFI and Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements.
- Up to 50 more actions on offer in the environmental land management schemes.
- Increased flexibility and easier access, with streamlined single application service for SFI and CS mid-tier.
- A premium payment for high ambition actions or for delivering packages of actions that will achieve greater environmental benefits.
- The new 2024 offer open to all farmers irrespective of previous BPS eligibility.

NSA has been informed by Defra that carbon footprinting will be included as a funded option later in the year.

Research project looks to improve UK wool industry

NSA is delighted to finally announce the launch of the Fabulous Fibre project.

NSA, along with British Wool, the Centre for Excellence in Livestock (CIEL), Langrish Farmers and the Wool Testing

Authority Europe (WTAE), have embarked on a 12-month wool focused research project looking to increase the value of wool through breeding and genetics. It aims to demonstrate a novel way to improve the productivity, sustainability and resilience of UK wool producers by exploring opportunities to improve fleece quality.

Frank Langrish's sheep flock will be the starting point for the project research, aiming to reduce micron and variation in the fibre diameter to produce a premium product yet still have a functional sheep producing both meat and wool from forage. The project is funded by Defra as part of its Farming Innovation Programme delivered in partnership with Innovate UK. *More information at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/our-work/news.*



NSA is pleased to lead a new wool-focused project.

New SFI actions have been announced for English farmers.

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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 Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region attracted a full room of new and old faces to hear about the issues affecting the sector at its January Annual Regional Members' Meeting.

Mike Credland was nominated as NSA Trustee as Henry Dunn stood down following his six-year stint on the NSA Board. Taking on this new position, Mr Credland stood down as NSA English Committee member explaining he was keen to see younger blood on the committee. Regional Vice Chair Andrew Powers was elected into the committee's vacant seat.

The meeting welcomed Taylor Farm Supplies, which highlighted the importance of faecal egg counting. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker and NSA Project Manager Nicola Noble provided an update on head office activity and industry news, including the regional concern around Schmalleberg. *More on page 44.*

NSA Marches Region filled the venue at its recent ARMM.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be holding its Annual Members' Meeting on Wednesday 28th February in the International Pavilion at the Royal Welsh Showground.Proceedings start at 11.30am with updates from NSA head office followed by lunch and talks from David Ashford of Welsh Government discussing the Sustainable Farming Scheme consultation, Richard Irvine, Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, and Animax. Contact me directly to book a place. *Contacts in left hand column.*

NSA Eastern Region

By Josh Brock, Manager

NSA Eastern Region lost a valued and talented member in early January – Cameron Farnan – a passionate sheep man and a good shearer.

Cameron won the NSA Next Generation Shepherd national final in 2022 while he was also in the NSA Next Generation Ambassador group. He will be greatly missed across the agricultural community. We would like to take this opportunity to pay respect to him and his family.

It also serves as a reminder of the importance of checking in with your friends and family, looking after yourself and your community. If you are struggling, talk to someone. Let's make it a good 2024.



Cameron Farnan.

NSA South East Region

Sarah Blake, Manager

The region would like to extend its congratulations to Megan Price on successful selection into the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme.

There is an exciting series of events scheduled for this year's intake and we look forward to welcoming Megan to regional meetings and events.

At our recent Annual Regional Members' Meeting, Dr Laura Tennant and Leara Proctor of Farm & Country Supplies gave interesting presentations on the benefits of lamb replacer milk and meeting ever changing efficiency targets. Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, provided a fascinating insight into the work of NSA over the past year.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting (ARMM) at the end of January saw changes to officeholders on the NSA Scottish Region committee.The ARMM concluded an excellent day after an insightful tour of British Wool's newest depot in Scotland ahead of the meeting. The tour of the Selkirk depot attracted a good number of members who heard about the current wool market and future plans of British Wool. *Full details of officeholder changes are on the NSA website and at www.nsascotland.org.uk.*

NSA Central Region

By Lizzy Wells, Manager

Planning is underway for a busy social year in NSA Central Region.

We kick off with our Next Generation Shepherd competition on Sunday 12th May, the qualifier event for the national final held at NSA Sheep 2024 in summer.

Our first farm walk of the year will take place on Thursday 6th June with Ed Brant of the Normanby flock at his farm near Louth, Lincolnshire. Discussions for a Field Day later in the year and a farm walk nearer the western side of the region in July are underway.



Shepherds competition takes place in May.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

The region looks forward to seeing many of you at the up-coming Annual Regional Members' Meeting on Thursday 22nd February at 7.30pm in the Stockman's Restaurant at Exeter Livestock Market, Devon.

This year we host NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker and Hugh Townsend, Senior Partner at Townsend Chartered surveyors. Phil will be updating on the work of NSA and activities planned for the coming year and Hugh will be providing his thoughts on the emerging environmental marketplace including carbon credits, biodiversity net gain and nutrient neutrality. The evening will include a buffet meal and opportunity for discussion. I look forward to seeing you there.

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Sheep Farmer magazine

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



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NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

The NSA Northern Region Annual Members' Meeting (ARMM) took place in early February welcoming new Chair Ted Ogden and thanking previous Chair Viv Lewis for her hard work.

The ARMM was the perfect opportunity to present two regional awards: The T.I. Allison Award presented annually for outstanding contribution to the sheep industry in the North of England and the Geoff Lawn Memorial Award, presented for valuable contributions made to the livestock sector by the next generation. John Stephenson, past Swaledale Sheep Breeders Association Secretary, won the T.I. Allison Award and junior auctioneer Rob Cloughton the Geoff Lawn Memorial Award.

Join us on Monday 19th February at Cockermonth, Cumbria, where we will cover the topic of what makes a successful lambing. AHDB, Animax and Carrs Billington will cover nutrition, hygiene, colostrum and minimising joint ill. *More details on the NSA website.*

NSA Northern Region's new Chair, Ted Ogden.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

The region is delighted to hear William Egerton from Rosslea, Co Fermanagh, has been selected as one of 12 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors this year.

William is a technology demonstration farmer, involved in a business development group and knows the benefits of peer learning. We are sure he will gain many new friends and beneficial insights.

At the Annual Regional Members' Meeting (ARMM) in early February, NSA Policy Manager Emma Bradbury and James Henderson from Seafields Farm, Co Down, joined as guest speakers.

Emma provided an update on NSA activity with a policy focus. James is a beef and sheep farmer who has doubled his grass output per hectare in recent years by using modern grazing management systems. Due to his remarkable increase in production and output he was Farmers Weekly Grassland Farmer of the Year runner-up.

Recruiting Reps - See website for details

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Introducing your new NSA Chair, fifth generation farmer Peter Delbridge

NSA is delighted to welcome Peter Delbridge, a loyal supporter of the organisation for more than 20 years, to the position of Chair following his election at the January NSA Board of Trustees' meeting.

Peter is a fifth generation sheep farmer from Exmoor, Devon, where he farms with wife Carol on the family's 400 acre (160ha) farm. They run 700 ewes comprising of 190 North Country Mules, 420 Exlanas and 90 Exmoor Horns.

He has served as NSA South West Region Trustee for the past six years and is currently a regional committee member and past regional Chair for the region.

Aside from NSA commitments, he sat on the NFU Uplands Forum during the development of the Upland Entry Level Scheme, has been a non executive director of Mole Valley Farmers since 2008, is a Trustee for the Exmoor Rural Health Hub at Cutcombe Market, and a founder member



Outgoing NSA Chair Dan Phipps passed the baton to Peter in January.

of the Sheep Improvement Group which has developed the Exlana breed since its inception some 20 years ago.

He comments: "It is a great honour being asked to be NSA Chair. NSA is an organisation I have been proudly involved with for more than 20 years. My aim, being a typical farmer, is to carry on the good work of all those that have held the post before and help leave it in a better place, fit and ready to take on the many varied challenges we as sheep farmers face locally, nationally and globally."

Peter took time out of his busy schedule to allow NSA to delve a little deeper into his life for members to learn more about their new Chair.

A man dedicated to the sector with a secret desire to be 'king of the road' and a passion for preserving the farmed upland environment, find out more about Peter here.

What makes you most proud to be a sheep farmer?

The fact we, as an industry, are producing a healthy nutritious and tasty source of protein with negligible impact on the world. We are not cutting down the rainforest. We are maintaining the environment and a landscape valued by most of the UK population and regarded to be in a desirable natural condition – or at least I believe they do, judging by the amount of leisure time they spend in it.

If you were to go for a pint with Secretary of State Steve Barclay, what would you ask him first?

Why the dickens do his colleagues in government, such as Jacob Rees Mogg, and the opposition parties for that matter, not value home UK food production? They all allow food to be imported from wherever it can be produced cheaper in the world, often to lower standards, and sometimes taking it out of the mouths of the

Peter is moving to a lower input system incorporating wool shedding sheep.

third world, which is almost immoral. Although unlikely to get it – I expect his honest answer would be politicians only think as far as the next five years, to the next election, so they want food to be as cheap as possible for their prospective voters.

You run several different sheep breeds on your farm. What is your argument when people say the UK has too many sheep breeds?

The variety of UK breeds offers most folk a solution to the obstacles faced by anyone wanting to keep sheep. Most breeds have adapted to the many varied local climatic and grazing conditions found throughout the UK. Some also have traits that may not currently be valued, but may be required in the future.

As an example, my father's generation looked to the wool cheque to pay the rent on a farm, but currently the wool shedding genes found in a small breed such as the Wiltshire Horn is helping to reduce costs in some sheep enterprises.

As an NSA trustee for several years as well as a non executive board member of Mole Valley Farmers, explain why you feel it's so important for farmers to be part of farming organisations.

Grouping together to achieve a common goal is both financially and psychologically rewarding for those participating as it gives them influence/clout and a positive position when dealing with other sectors within the agricultural industry.

While those direct benefits may not always be obvious or are sometimes blurred within the commercial or political worlds, the indirect influence exerted at the same time should not be underestimated. And an awful lot of that activity and influence would not happen if we all had to do it as individuals.

Once the collective powers of any membership organisation have been created and often hard earned, there comes the responsibility to use that power for the benefit of the wider group of members or sector, while remaining credible, relevant and sustainable.

You have increased the number of Exlana ewes in recent years. What made you go for a wool shedding breed, quite different from your Exmoor Horns and Mules?

Firstly, the Exmoor Horns have been on this farm, in the same family since c1850 so I would feel very loathed to be the one to remove them. With low maintenance costs and strong local demand they are more than wiping their face.

We are slowly replacing the Mules with Exlanas as this is better for our system and reduces the costs associated with dealing with wool removal. Although we started helping to develop the Exlana 20 years ago its only in the last seven or eight years interest in lower input shedding sheep has really grown.

As the fifth generation of the Delbridge family to farm on Exmoor, what do you see in the future for stock on uplands and moorland?

In the short term I can see the percentage of lower input sheep increasing on the hills, whether that be traditional or composite breeds. The higher input half-bred sheep will likely retreat to the lowlands, where they will still have a part to play.

I think suckler cows will continue to disappear from the hills. Of course they have the added complication of TB to contend with but, again economics will drive that.

That statement does come with a bit of a caveat though, in as much as we don't know what future requirement there will be for environmental grazing. This will become clear when it dawns on the political powers that undergrazing is a growing and serious problem,

Low maintenance costs has encouraged Peter to increase his Exlana flock.



Peter's family have farmed Exmoor Horns in their native landscape for 175 years.

resulting in such things as increasing incidence of wildfires and less wild birds and mammals because of the reduction in grazing ruminants producing invertebrate rich manure.

If you weren't a sheep farmer what career would you have liked to pursue?

I do like to travel around the UK, so I always also fancied HGV driving – king of the road!

What do you find the most rewarding thing about being a sheep farmer?

I am always amazed and thrilled at seeing a newborn lamb take its first breath. But after three weeks of lambing, the novelty does wear off.

What do you find the most challenging thing about being a sheep farmer?

The British weather. Working alone when we get fog day after day, usually in the autumn, that can last a week or two if we get a persistent south westerly air stream, can be challenging. But rain does make the grass grow, and in arid dry parts of the world they would absolutely love it. So I shouldn't complain too much.

What are your future plans and hopes for your farming enterprise?

I would like to continue farming at a level that gives me a better work life balance, allowing me enough time to dedicate to being NSA Chair for the next three years while allowing for one or two big trips abroad. I also hope to ensure the farm is in a better state when the time comes to hand it on to the next generation.

Quick fire facts

- Rugby or football? Rugby.
- Wine or beer? Beer.
- Show ring or sale ring? Sale ring.
- Roast beef or roast lamb? Both, I'm a big lad.
- Sheepdog or quad? Sheepdog – you can't talk to a quad.
- Indoor or outdoor lambing? Outdoor, as long as there isn't any snow.
- Summer or winter? Summer.
- Fleece or wool shedder? Shedder.
- Green, red or blue tractor? Blue.
- Sunrise or sunset? Sunset.

Lucky winner certain 2024 shepherding will be easier thanks to NSA giveaway

One Cornish turned Scottish farmer knows sheep work this year will be simpler after winning the 2023 NSA prize giveaway.

Kim Courtauld from Argyll will be making use of a modern mobile sheep handling system, kindly provided by Wise Agriculture.

Kim and his family moved to their hill farm five years ago, more than 600 miles north of their former home in Cornwall. They now run 285 ewes

as well as 40 cattle over 880 acres (356ha), and produce Christmas turkeys while managing four holiday cottages.

Kim was surprised to receive the amazing news he had been selected at random as the winner. He comments: "I could not believe it! I had entered after receiving an NSA and British Wool email promoting the competition. The sheep handling system will be a huge help to my aging body and will help revitalise our fank (fold)."

Generous support

NSA was able to offer those who entered the chance to win the prize, worth more than £10,000, thanks to generous support from Wise Agriculture, a family run business based in North Yorkshire servicing the entire UK. The company specialises in supplying cattle and sheep handling equipment from around the world, including weighing and EID equipment and software for livestock producers.

The 3.0m Porta-Yards mobile sheep handling system – made by Landquip, New Zealand, and



Kim is looking forward to receiving his mobile sheep handling system prize.

supplied by Wise Agriculture – is a combination of quality materials and functional design. Capable of handling 250 head the capacity can be increased when used with an existing fence to provide even more benefit.



The 2023 prize.

Another chance to win big with NSA this year!

NSA is excited to announce the launch of its latest prize giveaway offering the nation's sheep farmers a fantastic opportunity to improve stock transportation with a brand new livestock trailer.

The amazing prize of the Nugent L3618H 12ft livestock trailer with sheep decks is worth more than £9,500 and is kindly provided by Nugent Engineering.

Nugent hails from an agricultural family background. Initially designed to withstand the vigour of Ireland's livestock and rugged terrain, the Nugent Livestock range is engineered and hand built to last. With full type approval (ECWTA), any sheep farmer will appreciate the

attention to detail and be thrilled to win such a dazzling prize.

The prize draw is open to any UK sheep farmer over the age of 16. Both NSA members and non-members can enter, but entries are limited to one per person/email address. The quality product will provide one lucky winner with a new trailer packed with innovative features producing the perfect tool for the transportation of livestock.

Enter now

Entries can be made now and will be taken throughout 2024 with a single winner announced early next year. You can enter online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw and in person at NSA



Enter now for your chance to win a new livestock trailer from Nugent.

events. You can enter today by scanning the QR code on page 33 of this magazine.

Damien Nugent of Nugent Engineering says: "We are pleased to participate in NSA's prize giveaway for 2024. Nugent Livestock trailers have been created with the safety and welfare of both animal and operative at the core of the design brief, and so this new partnership with the NSA complements our commitment to the sheep sector."



Performance of cade lambs fed Ewe-reka matches ewe-reared lambs

Ewe-reka has been a game changer for rearing pet lambs over the last 10 years, as it is made with ewe's milk so lambs are almost guaranteed to be weaned at 6 weeks and finished along with single lambs reared on the ewe.

Cade lambs reared on Ewe-reka milk replacer at a Staffordshire farm are achieving the same performance as lambs reared by their mothers.

Will Roobottom runs two flocks of ewes at Cowley Hill Farm, Rugeley.



He has an 'A' flock of 300 pedigree Lleyns, which he describes as "good maternal ewes, easy lambing and hardy" and 200 Aberblacks and Suffolk crosses in a 'B' flock.

The A flock lambs indoors in February and the B flock in March.

Key to getting the lambs off to a good start is meticulous colostrum management. Will uses a refractometer to measure colostrum quality, aiming for a Brix value of 22% or higher.

Measuring helps Will to identify if colostrum is of sufficient quality to feed the lambs; if quality is poor or if there is insufficient quantity a powdered colostrum is used as a substitute feed.

Cade lambs are bottle-fed and when there are more than 10 requiring a bottle, feeding switches to a Heatwave adlib system, with feeding equipment cleaned daily.

Will has used Ewe-Reka lamb milk replacer for four years, he reports that the performance of his cade lambs is no different to those reared on the ewe. The lambs reared on milk replacer are weaned at six weeks compared to 12 weeks, or 25kg, for ewe-reared lambs.



Will Roobottom of Cowley Hill Farm, Rugeley.

For accuracy, Will weighs the Ewe-reka powder used for each feed, when feeding adlib Will mixes at a 18% DM (180g/L) mixed up to 1 litre of mixed milk.

To ensure consistency, one person takes charge of lamb rearing to minimise any risk of changes to the mix.

All lambs are provided with creep feed, fresh water and hay.

In the 2023 lambing season Will trialed a new system, turning lambs out and offering creep in feeders instead of keeping them housed for a few weeks thus providing a cleaner and healthier rearing environment. As a result, growth rates improved.

Will retains 55 ewe lambs for breeding and sells the remainder at pedigree sales. He aims to supply around 70 male lambs to a local butcher and sells the others to his local abattoir, with lambs finished at approximately 42-48kg; Aberblack crosses average a R3L grade and the Lleyns range from R-O to R3L.



With Ewe-reka as with all cade lambs, keeping adlib dry feed in front of them until they are ready for market is key. Lambs will kill out at 50% so are ready at 35kg LW. Don't take a chance on anything less – insist on Ewe-reka, now the UK's number 1 ewe milk replacer.



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NSA Scot Sheep 2024

It's full steam ahead for the organising committee of NSA Scot Sheep, working with the Hamilton family as hosts to create the most important specialist event in the year for sheep producers in Scotland, Northern England and beyond.

The one-day event with Virgin Money as the major sponsor will welcome an abundance of trade stands, seminars, workshops and working demonstrations, as well as the ever popular farm tour, show and sale of pairs of ewe hogs and competitions including fencing, sheepdog trials, sheep shearing, stockjudging and the NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year.

The hosts

The Hamilton family – brothers James, Charles and Harry, along with their mother, Vanessa – lamb 1,400 Blackface ewes each year on the 1,900 acres (770ha) of Aikengall Farm, of which 700 are bred pure and the remainder crossed to the Bluefaced Leicester to produce Scotch Mules.



Aikengall Farm.

Adding to their enterprise over the years, the operation now includes the 400-acre (160ha) neighbouring unit, Thurston Mains, as well as the 1,200-acre (485ha) tenanted farm, Nunraw, and, more recently, some 600 acres (240ha) at Barney Mains, both in East Lothian. They also contract farm an upland unit of 2,000 acres (800ha) near Heriot in the Scottish Borders.

Together with a flock of 1,400 Scotch Mules at Nunraw, the Hamiltons are lambing some 2,800 ewes per year which they run alongside a 900-strong herd of spring-calving cows based heavily on Simmental genetics.

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NSA Sheep Event is back

NSA is excited for the return of its flagship NSA Sheep Event in July. Following on from the success of NSA Sheep 2022 the event will once again celebrate the UK's varied sheep sector with variety shown to be the key component of a strong farming future. The day will offer attractions for all the family from informative seminars and interactive workshops featuring respected industry experts to the NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year finals and the many sheep focused trade stands demonstrating the best products and equipment for running an efficient sheep system. The popular sheepdog sale will also take place on the day.

Sustainability report

A highlight will be the launch of an NSA report into the sustainability achievements and opportunities for the UK sheep sector, produced in collaboration with Harper Adams University. This will feature in many of the debates in the popular seminar pavillion where leading names from the UK sheep industry will discuss and update visitors on issues such as sheep farming's role in environmental protection and driving the UK's future market and trade options. As in previous years Field Farm Tours will be leading visits to two forward-thinking local farms as part of the build up and a celebration NSA Sheep Event dinner will be held the evening before. NSA events are the only shows of this kind offering sheep-focused business networking opportunities and NSA members receive free entry.



Popular seminars return.

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Bluetongue remains a concern for UK sheep farmers.

Bluetongue impact continues with farmers being warned to remain alert

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

NSA is joining daily disease control updates to ensure members are kept up to date on the bluetongue virus status in the UK.

policy and movement restrictions are likely to be reviewed and amended for a restricted period of time. They will continue to be based on pre-movement PCR and serotype testing in order to prevent spread and require licensing.

industry continues to work collectively to ensure as much up to date information is available.

The Ruminant Health & Welfare website continues to share live updates, previous webinars on bluetongue and contacts for a bluetongue hotline.

A series of fortnightly bluetongue webinars, hosted on AHDB's platform at 6pm on Wednesdays, also started on 24th January with dates scheduled until mid-April. This series provides live updates and presentations from industry experts on bluetongue highlighting disease information, risk factors and potential indicators in livestock.



A fortnightly webinar series providing live updates on bluetongue started in January.

During the latter months of 2023, Defra announced new cases of bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) in Norfolk, leading to the establishment of the second temporary control zone (TCZ) in Britain. The UK's chief veterinary officer has urged farmers to remain vigilant for bluetongue following the development.

Bluetongue is a notifiable viral disease of ruminants and camelids which is spread by biting midges. BTV does not affect people or food safety, so meat and milk from infected animals are safe to eat and drink.

Positive cases

At the time of writing there are over 60 positive cases in Kent and Norfolk after the initial outbreak of the virus on 11 November 2023 – the UK's first case since 2007.

Both these zones have been extended very slightly following surveillance and the identification of new cases close to the boundary, but we are in a low risk period in terms of vector (midge) activity and consequently the zoning

This should allow the return of sheep that are away on tack, for example, although it will require pre-movement testing as described above. Moves to slaughter do not require pre-movement testing but we can expect the continued requirement for destination abattoirs to be designated and moves licensed.

NSA encourages members to stay up to date as much as possible due to likely changes in control zones and movement restrictions. The sheep

Impact

NSA is guiding anyone who feels they are struggling or troubled by the impact of BTV, Schmallenberg or any other farming challenges to make contact with farming mental health charities such as Farming Community Network, RABI and/or your local charity.

Given the likelihood of the situation changing suddenly, NSA will keep members abreast of the most current situation via email. If you do not already receive the NSA Weekly Email Update on a Friday, we do not hold your email address on file – see page 2 for how and why to change this.

More on BTV on page 42 and at www.ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus.

Farmer input essential for directing Welsh policy, says NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region urges all regional members to respond to the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) consultation to ensure proposed actions remain suitable.

As you may be aware, Welsh Government has launched its final consultation on the Sustainable Farming Scheme – Keeping Farmers Farming. The consultation builds on the outline proposals set out by Welsh Government as part of its consultation in 2022. Welsh Government continues to recognise the case for supporting farmers and the need for a universal set of actions all farmers should undertake in return for a baseline payment.

Response needed

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be putting in a detailed response but recommends all members respond individually, as this proposed new scheme will see a generational change to the

way we farm our land and produce food. There has never been a more important consultation to respond to.



The region is upset universal payment rates are not yet disclosed.

Welsh Government has held a series of roadshows discussing this consultation and insight gained from attending will be written into the NSA response.

The region will carefully consider the proposals to ensure they work for all farmers, including tenants and commoners. It is disappointing there

is no suggestion of monetary value attached to the base payments, making it difficult for members to plan ahead without this essential piece of the jigsaw.

Disease screening

In separate news, the region has agreed to donate funding to a project at the Wales Veterinary Science Centre (WVSC) giving stakeholders the chance to collectively take some control of the health, welfare and reputation of the Welsh sheep flock. The scheme will develop a disease screening service and the funding will allow WVSC to offer sheep serology (blood) testing as a screening tool for flocks.

The long-term view would be the creation of a national flock scheme, similar to the cattle Gwaredu BVD scheme, but industry led and covering several diseases at once. NSA Cymru/Wales Region is pleased to support this initiative, which it hopes will benefit the wider UK sheep industry too.

More on the SFS on pages 16-17.

Concerns for Scotland as Ag Bill progresses through parliament

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



A reminder to all members wishing to submit their 2023 claim under the Preparing for Sustainable Farming initiative – you must do so by Thursday 29th February.

This includes carbon audits, soil analysis and/or animal health and welfare interventions. This year is set to be the last year in which businesses can claim up to a total of £1,250. Make sure you do not miss out on your opportunity to receive this support ahead of future agricultural policy change.

NSA Scottish Region attended a meeting in early December with Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, and a range of Scottish food and agricultural stakeholders, to discuss the importance of engagement and having workable solutions implemented into future policy.

While there has been some movement within the first stage of the introduced Agriculture and

Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill in Parliament, when the Bill passes stage two and three it may cause fear pertaining to amendments. Securing, ring-fencing and workable budgets were at the heart of discussions to ensure continued support for quality food production alongside other unique attributes agriculture delivers.

Farm plans

NSA Scottish Region has also been in discussions surrounding the whole farm plan element of future support, with a foundational focus to have a long-term understanding of minimum standards to build best practice and deliver actionable, valuable information for farmers versus the expense of implementing new changes to policy. Scottish Government is carrying out an exercise to examine the cross recognition of standards investigations into benchmarking for carbon and biodiversity audits.

Despite 2023 being a year for yet another unexpected withdrawal of sorely needed funds

from the agriculture budget, the region has been assured by the Cabinet Secretary all monies will be restored in full, working to a timetable to be outlined this month. With undoubtedly more announcements and surprises around the corner, surely we can expect some information that will start to make sense in the wider picture?



February is the deadline to apply to the Preparing for Sustainable Farming scheme.

Daera shares insights into proposed future farming payments for NI

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



We are beginning to get snippets of information from Daera regarding the Farm Sustainability Payment, the new scheme set to replace the Basic Payment Scheme.

Daera is finalising details likely to be announced this month. One of the things we can expect from 2024 onwards is 8.5% coming off payments to fund the new beef carbon reduction scheme and, from 2025, there is likely to be 17% coming off to pay for a new suckler cow scheme.

Priority topic

Despite protests and suggestions from NSA NI Region and the Sheep Taskforce Group it seems Daera cannot find a way to introduce something similar for the sheep sector. Hopefully, all will be revealed shortly but this remains a priority topic

for the region that we're continuing to work on.

Here in Northern Ireland we are watching bluetongue progress through UK counties and hope our lower temperatures keep the midges from coming this far north next summer.

Schmallenberg is a different matter, with cases

being reported as lambing gets underway. Daera has a block on cattle and sheep entering NI from Great Britain in a bid to keep the bluetongue virus out.

See page 42 and 44 for full details on bluetongue and Schmallenberg respectively.



BTV presence in the UK has impinged livestock movements to NI.

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Concerns loom over Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme representation

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

NSA remains uneasy that the current Welsh Government consultation on Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) continues to ignore some of the fundamental concerns of the farming industry.

While Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) in England are well under way with years of development under their belt, Wales has come out with another round of consultation on what its final scheme might look like.

NSA is thankful Welsh Government is stating a commitment to food production but feels there is a long way to go to get meaningful uptake. This consultation period is set to be the final step in the long-term ambition for government support for the Welsh farming industry.

Welsh Government state the SFS will serve as the primary source of government support rewarding farmers for actions that align with Sustainable Land Management objectives set out in the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023. These are:

- To provide food in a sustainable manner.
- To mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- To maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide.
- To conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them.
- To sustain the Welsh language, promote and facilitate its use.

Welsh Government has outlined its commitment to producing safe, high-quality food, stating it is vital for Wales. But it is clear the current climate



and nature emergency is at the forefront of the decision making.

The SFS will provide opportunity for those who go above and beyond the minimum requirements set out by law, and for those delivering a baseline.

Actions

Universal actions will be required by all participants in the scheme. Optional actions enable farmers to go further if they wish. These are likely to be targeted to specific land or landscape feature issues such as reducing ammonia emissions, creating leaky dams, crops emissions, crops that reduce bought in feed and slurry/manure management. Collaborative actions involve working with others to deliver change on a larger scale that cannot be delivered at a single farm level – for example, knowledge transfer, landscape scale action, supply chain opportunities and co-operative working.

During the transition period (2025-2029) these three layers will be introduced in phases. There will be a stability payment during the transition period and farmers who join the SFS and received a BPS payment in 2024 could also receive a stability payment in addition to the universal baseline payment. BPS will reduce by 20% year on year until the cut off in 2029 and you can't be in both BPS and SFS – it's one or the other.

By entering SFS you will need to carry out universal actions (see table) and meet scheme rules to receive the universal baseline payment. Welsh Government has recognised some actions are not applicable to all farms and there will be a degree of flexibility.

At least 10% of each farm will be managed as habitat from year one, plus at least 10% under tree cover as woodland or individual trees by

2030. There is also a data confirmation exercise to confirm habitat and tree cover on your farm in 2024 and a carbon assessment using a specified carbon calculator will need to be completed within the first year of joining and repeated in 2029.

NSA encourages all members in Wales to read the consultation thoroughly and to respond by considering the implications, problems and benefits of integrating the scheme on your farm. Those with tenancy and rental agreements, or alternative grazing agreements, common grazings and new entrants should consider how this scheme might work for them and make their views heard at this late stage in its development.

Data collection

Farm data will play an important role in the new scheme with much of what is recorded used by Welsh Government primarily for processing and validation of payments. The data may also be used to operate other schemes, for monitoring and for other purposes. Welsh Government says it may need to aggregate data to represent statistics or trends but this will be anonymised. It may also share information with other UK and Welsh governmental departments.

NSA believes every sector of our economy needs to play its part in reducing emissions and reversing the decline of biodiversity – but it is vital any future scheme is fit for purpose and meaningful for farmers to participate. Wales is renowned for its ideal grass growing conditions, and a pastoral approach to land management has framed its reputation as well as its wildlife and ecology, and its resultant food production.

NSA accepts the UK should plan to utilise the produce grown on our doorstep as far as practically possible in order to safeguard food

security, providing support and legislation to establish resilient processing and supply chains, and protect and create sustainable economic opportunities for primary, and businesses relying on primary producers in Wales. This affords them with the ability to reinvest in delivering high environmental and animal welfare outcomes.

Commitment

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Development Officer, Helen Roberts, says: "NSA is pleased to see the commitment from Welsh Government to tackle climate change, but it is imperative to comprehend the carbon and climate benefits of grassland, mixed swards and pastoral farm infrastructure such as hedgerows in tackling the climate change emergency.

"The farmed environment can provide huge benefits for the climate and the natural environment, and for local economies and communities if measured holistically and properly invested in. The answers do not lie just within tree planting targets. Poorly planned and managed tree planting can have negative impacts on carbon, nature and rural communities.

"There is an alarming amount of work to be facilitated to develop a scheme fit for new entrants, tenants, commoners, graziers, share farmers, contract farmers and cross border farming enterprises. NSA encourages Welsh Government to act as soon as possible to develop scheme options appropriate to support those in alternate farming agreements. The discounting of these groups is extremely worrying and potentially damaging to a sector already struggling with succession and business viability."

NSA will be submitting a full response to the consultation but would welcome member feedback via policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Universal actions	
UA1 – Benchmarking	Complete an annual measuring and monitoring self-assessment to optimise business and environmental performance.
UA2 – Continuous professional development	Build additional skills and knowledge by completing an annual training cycle.
UA3 – Soil health planning	Build healthy soils through testing and soil health planning.
UA4 – Multispecies cover crop	Protect soils from erosion and degradation through the establishment of a multispecies cover crop on all land which is uncropped over winter.
UA5 – Integrated pest management	Complete an annual assessment of plant protection products used, and alternative methods employed to reduce chemical usage.
UA6 – Managing heavily modified peatland	Active management of modified peatlands to protect soil carbon stocks.
UA7 – Habitat maintenance	Maintenance of existing semi-natural habitats to optimise benefits for grazing livestock and wildlife.
UA8 – Create temporary habitat on improved land	Create additional temporary habitat features on improved land to meet the scheme requirement for a minimum habitat area.
UA9 – Designated site management plans	Have a management plan with Natural Resources Wales in place for designated sites in your control.
UA10 – Ponds and scrapes	Manage existing ponds and scrapes, or create new scrapes to boost wildlife associated with water features on farm.
UA11 – Hedgerow management	Develop hedgerows to become dense stockproof barriers that also provide valuable shelter and an important habitat for wildlife.
UA12 – Woodland management	Maintain existing woodlands to optimise benefits for livestock, wildlife, and business diversification.
UA13 – Create new woodland and agroforestry	Integrate additional trees and woodland to meet the scheme requirement for a minimum tree cover.
UA14 – Historic environment (maintenance & enhancement)	Protect important heritage features from further damage to conserve cultural character.
UA15 – Animal health improvement cycle	Work with your vet to establish an ongoing proactive approach to animal health.
UA16 – Good animal welfare	Complete competency training and carry out lameness and body condition scoring to improve livestock welfare standards.
UA17 – Good farm biosecurity	Have in place biosecurity measures to reduce risks of disease coming onto or leaving the farm.



The Register of Sheep Advisers

Looking for an adviser?

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

Interested in joining as an adviser?

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



Join an NSA committee and make sure every sheep farming voice counts

NSA is a grassroots organisation, taking the lead from the ground up – but have you ever thought of becoming more involved?

NSA is split into nine regions, six in England then one in each of the devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each region is represented by a committee including a Regional Chair and Vice Chair, with administrative support provided by a Regional Manager.

Regional committees are essential in ensuring sheep farmers' voices are heard and represented by NSA in external meetings with decision makers and influencers. Committees are made up of volunteers with new members welcomed regularly to support in the organisation of popular events throughout the calendar year, including NSA Sheep Events, Field Days, industry talks and farm walks.

Coordinating

Fiona Parker, NSA Support & Activities Officer, started with NSA in November 2022 with her role tailored to assist in coordinating regional activity by working with the regional managers.

She comments: "Having regional committees allows NSA activity to not only cover the whole of the UK sheep industry but also gives the organisation the ability to highlight specific regional challenges, which NSA can then raise with the appropriate bodies, such as policymakers."

Fiona says a good example of this is the Dartmoor enquiry and upland/hill specific policy changes.

Taking views forward from regional committees are representatives joining the NSA Policy & Technical Committee and, in England, the NSA English Committee.

The NSA Policy & Technical Committee is tasked by the NSA Board to:

- Discuss current and forthcoming policy and technical issues to aid NSA staff in reaching organisational policy positions and priorities for its work nationally.
- Ensure consistent messaging from all staff and officeholders on policy and technical issues, including supporting the production and annual approval of NSA policy positions where appropriate.
- Research and debate specific policy and technical issues, seeking clarity and ensuring



NSA committees are a welcoming way to share your views.

the consideration of all NSA members and their farming types.

- Encourage all NSA committees to discuss relevant policy and technical issues by ensuring a report from discussion with UK Policy & Technical representatives is a standing agenda item on individual committee agendas. This includes regional and ram sale committees and the NSA English Committee.

The NSA English Committee works to ensure NSA activity in policy and technical areas reflects the needs of NSA's English members. The English regional committees elect their own representatives for this, who are then tasked by the NSA Board to discuss current and forthcoming issues. This aids NSA staff, the NSA Chief Executive and the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee in ensuring NSA policy positions and priorities represent the views of NSA members and farming types in England.

Dialogue

Kevin Harrison, NSA English Committee Chair, explains: "The scope of the committee includes all English relevant policy and technical subjects, issues raised by committee members and from two-way communication with the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee.

"The committee can communicate directly on English matters with Ministers and also ensure appropriate representation of NSA on external English boards, such as Red Tractor Assurance and AHDB. It really is an important group representing English sheep farmers."

Being involved in a committee opens up the opportunity to be involved directly with the work of the NSA but also to help shape key aspects of future policy.

Richard Vines sits on the NSA English Committee and the NSA Sustainable Farming Incentive pilot group and comments: "Participating in the NSA SFI Pilot group has been really useful. Having the opportunity to speak directly with policymakers relating to the development of the future direction of agricultural support and to help shape emerging policy is both exciting and quite a rare opportunity.

"Sitting on the English Committee has also been of benefit and I have been able to contribute directly on behalf of my region. The benefits from being on the committees are particularly useful to gauge the opinions from different regions as the industry has different biases depending on its geography and location.

"Furthermore, the chance to speak to others from across the country is a great part of committee involvement. Otherwise it would be very easy to keep our heads down and allow the workload from our sector to move us through the seasons with little conversation or discussion on what others are doing and how they are finding farming. It is a privilege to be able to help the industry through my engagement."

NSA committees cannot function without the input of NSA members. Anyone can attend a regional committee meeting and ensure their views are heard and, in turn, these views will be fed into the committees described above.

NSA would therefore encourage members to look out for their next regional event to speak with their committee members and officeholders. New members are always welcomed with a smile, a listening ear and more often than not a cup of tea!

Interested in being involved? Chat to your Regional Manager – contacts on page 2.

Literal Lifesaver and an Absolute Must! On-farm Success with Provita Lambing Range

Lamb mortality and neonatal deaths remain very high in the global sheep industry and keeping newborn lambs alive is no easy task.

The principal causes of early lamb deaths are hypothermia, starvation, and watery mouth. In previous years, the use of oral Spectam® Scour Halt (spectinomycin antibiotic) has been the primary method of treatment & prevention.

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Customer Feedback: Provita Lamb Response has been **"a literal life saver and is an absolute must in the lambing shed!"**



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By Dr T.B. Barragry PhD MSc MVB MRCVS

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Ambassadors will see a variety of different sheep enterprises during the year.

New NSA Next Generation Ambassador group aims for successful year



The difficult task of selecting the next group of bright, young sheep enthusiasts to join the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme provided a new year challenge for the experienced interview panel.

A record number of applications from exceptional young sheep farmers were put through their paces by interviewers Michael Burley (NSA Cymru/ Wales Region and 2022 Next Generation Ambassador), Mary Dunlop (NSA Scottish Region), Kevin Harrison (NSA English Committee Chair) and Eileen McCloskey (NSA Northern Ireland Region).

Selection

Fiona Parker, NSA Support & Activities Officer, joined the panel and says: "NSA Next Generation interview day always presents an enjoyable but difficult task. All the shortlisted candidates were worthy of joining and we encourage those who were unsuccessful to reapply again and in the meantime become further involved with NSA."

Details of what the group of 12 selected ambassadors get up to this year will be shared via regular updates online at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk and in *Sheep Farmer* magazine.

NSA Next Generation is funded by NSA Head Office, regions and ram sales, with the Ambassador programme additionally supported by various delivery partners and sponsors.



The 2023 ambassadors.

Meet our new Ambassador programme recruits

William Roobottom (27) Staffordshire

Social media enthusiast William is looking forward to sharing his experiences from the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme with his followers on his popular YouTube channel and Instagram accounts.

Currently running 300 Lleyn ewes, William has built up his flock over the past 10 years. He introduced livestock for the first time on his family's farm, which specialises in production of forage for the equine market. William now aims to increase sheep numbers to continue to complement this, as well as focussing on traits within his flock required to produce a more efficient ewe.

Having been an NSA member for several years William has already enjoyed many of the membership benefits but is now looking forward to getting more intricately involved. He says: "I see it as a great honour to be selected as an NSA Next Generation Ambassador being able to learn and develop while representing the great UK sheep sector. I will do as much as I can to get involved."



Llewellyn Rosser (22) Gloucestershire

Contract shepherding and running his own flock of 350 ewes on rented ground, new entrant Llewellyn has overcome some of the challenges faced by many young farmers to acquire land in order to progress their businesses.

Building up his flock from scratch with no support payments has led to Llewellyn making conscious decisions to produce lambs efficiently and set himself up, he hopes, to be able to grow numbers in the future.

Llewellyn is looking forward to meeting like minded people during the programme and believes the chance to get off farm both to learn and network will help him with his own confidence as well as his business. He is also keen to become involved with NSA longer term, and comments: "I believe the programme will help me massively. I am looking forward to getting involved in my NSA region, giving back for what I am about to gain."



Megan Price (20) Hampshire

At just 20, Megan impressed the interview panel with her ability to juggle work and education as she completed her third year at Sparsholt University in Hampshire studying agriculture.

Throughout her studies Megan has strived to gain as much shepherding experience as possible as she works towards her dream of shepherding her own flock after securing a tenancy, or as a head shepherd for a sizable flock. At the heart of this will be the very best welfare as Megan expressed a passion for this during her interview. She says: "There is still work to do on public perception of agriculture, and providing animals with the highest standards of welfare at all times is key to this."



Emma Clapp (30) Edinburgh

Emma has the covid pandemic to thank for her changing career path to begin farming.

She had always had an interest in agriculture but says: "When the pandemic hit I was unhappy in my job. I knew I needed to make a change and so got in touch with a local farmer who I volunteered for and learnt new skills."

Fast forward four years and Emma is now working as head shepherd on a 400 acre (160ha) Scottish estate managing 1,200 Lleyn cross ewes plus replacements - an achievement that greatly impressed the interview panel.

Emma hopes becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador will be the start of a long relationship with NSA and is looking forward to continuing her learning and career development.



Continued overleaf.

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Emily Jones (25)

Ceredigion

The ambassador interview panel were bowled over by Emily's enthusiasm.

Emily currently splits her time between her job as an account handler for the Farmers Union of Wales and work on the family sheep and beef hill farm in West Wales. In addition, she fills her busy schedule with volunteering for a mental wellbeing charity, the DPJ Foundation, sits on several livestock breed society committees and is a qualified Registered Animal Medicines Advisor (RAMA).

Despite this, it was clear Emily was determined to make time for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme and is looking forward to implementing ideas and experience gained back with her pedigree flocks of North Country Cheviot, Charmoise Hill and Dorset Down ewes as well as her family's commercial enterprise of Easy Care and Welsh Mountain ewes.



Sean Jeffreys (26)

Carmarthenshire

As one of the new entrants to farming joining this year's programme, Sean impressed the panel with his achievements in the sector so far.

Having previously worked for the HCC Red Meat Development Programme, he is now a partner in a share farm agreement running 600 Llandovery White Face hill ewes and a further 200 ewe lambs. He also rears calves on contract destined to produce wagyu beef.

Sean has already completed several development schemes but was passionate to join the NSA programme as he believes it will provide unparalleled sheep farming knowledge and experience.

He says: "Becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador is a great opportunity. I believe it will nurture, inspire and encourage us as a group of young sheep farmers, creating leaders who will step up and take the reins in the future."



William Egerton (31)

County Fermanagh

Growing up on a progressive sheep and beef farm in Northern Ireland William has always been open to new ideas and technologies.

It was clear during the ambassador interview process the enthusiasm for the latest advances was a passion of his. William enjoys learning and is keen to embrace the knowledge and experiences that will be gained on the Ambassador programme.

William comments: "Many farms are not familiar with the technology available to them and how it could help farm businesses reach full potential. I hope I can share my previous experience in this area as well as learning more about this with my fellow ambassadors and other sheep sector members I meet during the programme."

As well as his family farm experience running 250 ewes, a suckler herd and finishing beef cattle William has also spent time in Scotland working on larger enterprises and enjoyed the opportunity to view different systems. He is now looking forward to visiting the range of farms explored as part of the ambassador delivery sessions.



NSA ambassadors can look forward to both lectures and on-farm practicals.

Richard Oglesby (31)

Northumberland

Richard has made impressive progress in the industry from his initial entry to sheep farming as a teenager with just a handful of sheep.

Alongside his wife he runs 1,440 mostly Lleyn ewes plus 800 ewe lambs on land as part of a contract farming agreement. Richard's passion for the industry was clear to see during his ambassador interview as he explained his involvement with several projects destined to help further progress his own flock and the wider UK sheep sector.

He comments: "I enjoy being part of industry peer groups. They give me chance to continue my learning of the industry from a range of enterprises, something I am passionate about, while also sharing my experiences to hopefully assist others."

Richard is already a member of the NSA Northern Region Committee so will be well placed to share the benefits of his involvement with NSA to the ambassador group.



Ailish Ross (29)

West Midlands

Ailish may already be a familiar face to many as her job with the Texel Sheep Society regularly takes her across the UK to sales and shows meeting NSA members.

This role has given Ailish a fantastic opportunity to travel and network but she admits her knowledge and experience of the wider sector is something she would like build on. She hopes the programme will help her to achieve this.

Although her day job keeps her away from practical farming she enjoys spending weekends shepherding alongside her partner in South Wales running a flock of 1,200 Lleyn ewes.

She says: "I am happiest working outside with the sheep. I do not come from a farming background but have worked hard over the past 10 years to gain experience and I hope to soon be in a position to start my own small flock. I feel the ambassador programme will put me in an even better position to do so."



Jack Fletcher (19)

Norfolk

Jack may be the youngest member of the ambassador group but the interview panel were positive his already impressive experience of the sheep industry, both at home and in New Zealand, would be of value to the group as a whole.

Growing up on a family sheep farm has given Jack a great skillset on which to develop. His ambition is clear with the aim of growing his own sheep flock as well as building on his already successful shearing business to offer additional services such as dipping and scanning in the future.

Jack comments: "I'm looking forward to becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador. It is important to take time away from the farm and if I can do this while achieving personal and career development with like minded people, mountains can be moved!"



George Fussey (28)

Lincolnshire

A willingness to gain more knowledge and expertise about the UK sheep sector led George to apply as an ambassador this year.

"I'm a big believer in sharing knowledge, not just of sheep farming but of regenerative agriculture in general, an area of interest for me. I feel becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador is the perfect place to continue with this career and personal development," George explains.

After completing his agricultural degree at Harper Adams, George travelled, working on farms in Australia, New Zealand and Norway. On returning home to his family farm he was happy to use the experience from his travels and take on responsibility for the expanding sheep enterprise. The flock currently comprises of 400 Aberfield cross ewes run on herbal leys as part of the wider enterprise's arable rotations.



Kathryn Dick (25)

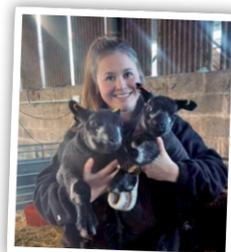
Stirlingshire

Meeting people and sharing information and experiences were key drivers for Kathryn when applying to join the ambassador programme this year.

Her current job as Promotions & Communications Office for the Lleyn Sheep Society and past experience working as a business reporter for Scottish Farmer has already raised her awareness of the value of sharing knowledge.

"Meeting a multitude of people you get a sense of what mindset is required in order to make a positive change to your business and the sector as a whole," she comments.

Kathryn is looking forward to the opportunity to network and gain useful advice to help further her small flock of Blue Texel and Charollais sheep. She plans to begin performance recording this year with the aim of being recognised for producing naturally reared tups with good longevity and the ability to thrive in commercial and pedigree settings.



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New regional Chair views challenges and opportunities from the rostrum

By Katie James, NSA

While new to the role of NSA Northern Region Chair, Ted Ogden has been a trusted face at several of England's thriving livestock market for almost 30 years.

Growing up on a mixed family farm in North Yorkshire Ted attributes his career path to his grandfather. "He was a first generation farmer and livestock dealer travelling across the north of England and Scotland purchasing stock for himself and others. It was accompanying him alongside my father that I caught the bug for livestock markets," Ted explains.

Pursuing this curiosity he completed work experience at two auction markets as a teenager before completing an agricultural marketing degree at Harper Adams University.

He says: "Agricultural college took me away from the family farm but I recognised my older brother would take it on, so I looked for a career

combining my interest in livestock and trading, and my experience at markets. Auctioneering was the obvious choice."

Having completed his degree Ted took a position at Clitheroe Auction Mart, Lancashire, before moving to Cumbria working for Penrith Farmers and Kidds, and then Harrison & Hetherington, returning back to his home patch in North Yorkshire with CCM at Skipton Auction Mart in 2008.

"I feel I have covered much of northern England during my 28 years of experience as an auctioneer," Ted adds.

Family

During this time Ted has remained interested in the family farm - Owlet Hall Farm - on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales in Austwick, which is run ably by brother James and his wife Deborah.

Traditionally a mixed dairy, beef and sheep enterprise, the farm now concentrates on its 400 Charollais cross Mule ewes and North of England Mule ewe lambs on which a Beltex cross Texel



Ted Ogden.

ram is used to produce quality prime lambs. Ewes are lambed indoors in March following on with the gimmer hogs and Ted sometimes returns to the farm to help out during busy periods.

"If I get a phone call to go I'm happy to help, but it is James and Deborah's farm, so unless asked I leave them to it," he says.

The farm also produces high quality suckler cows with Limousin calves at foot, which are reared and sold as stores through Skipton Market.

For farmers like Ted's brother the livestock market remains a crucial part of the farming business and an important element of the rural community, but Ted recognises the current and future challenges facing live markets.

"In all areas and especially in the uplands we are seeing falling stock numbers partly due to the cost of production and also the availability of farm staff," explains Ted. "I consider altering government policy to be the biggest challenge creating a serious trend of reducing stock numbers.

"It is clear to me new policies are not centred on producing food but on other non-farming ideologies of the countryside. Decisions are being made by people sat behind desks who believe

they know how the countryside should look and function without considering what has formed the countryside we know and enjoy.

"But farmers and the allied industry are resilient. I was a young auctioneer when foot and mouth arrived in Cumbria, a harrowing time, but farmers restocked and businesses rebuilt. It's just one example of the industry's ability to bounce back."

Markets

With the many benefits livestock markets can offer farmers, Ted believes their role in the farming community is greater than ever.

He explains: "The strength of a livestock market is it follows one of the old rules of economics, bringing together willing sellers with willing buyers in one place to enact a sale. It's a 200-year-old system but it works.

"All mediums for selling livestock have their place. Farmers are dependent on when stock is ready, having staff available to work with or sort stock, transport it etc - so each farmer will do what suits them at the time they need to make a sale. I believe livestock markets are the most transparent of all methods. Stock is available for people to see and view its sale, so they know its value."

And the value of the market is not just providing a platform for sale but a lifeline to many for who the mart offers an opportunity to meet with others both for business and socially.

"You can't put a price on the social and mental wellbeing of coming to market. An increasing number are working alone at home. Having some time off farm is important and a market is a familiar and interesting place for those members of the community to do so. It's not only important for the farmers but the auctioneers too!" comments Ted.

With markets still attracting a loyal following of sellers, buyers and onlookers, the career as an auctioneer Ted believes is still appealing to enthusiastic new entrants to the profession.



Ted promotes livestock markets for both business and social interactions.

"It's a highly rewarding sector to be involved in," says Ted. "And opportunities exist to enter the job through different routes.

"We have five apprentices at Skipton Mart, some started on their career path as drovers, others as graduate surveyors, but the flexibility gives a wider range of people chance to get involved and work towards becoming an auctioneer."

Demands

Ted admits the job is more demanding than when he first became a junior auctioneer: "We live in a faster paced world now. When I first started I didn't have a mobile phone, now how could I do my job without it? People want information at their fingertips. They don't want to wait for the market report in the farming press on a Friday morning, they want it the same day."

Among the job's merits is the opportunity to meet people, to learn from them, and to help them with their farming businesses.

He adds: "Everyone is searching for the economically viable answers to keep them enthused and in business allowing them to earn a realistic living giving opportunity to reinvest

in their farms, whether that is building, stock or machinery to keep their farming efficient and safe. I hope we help with that."

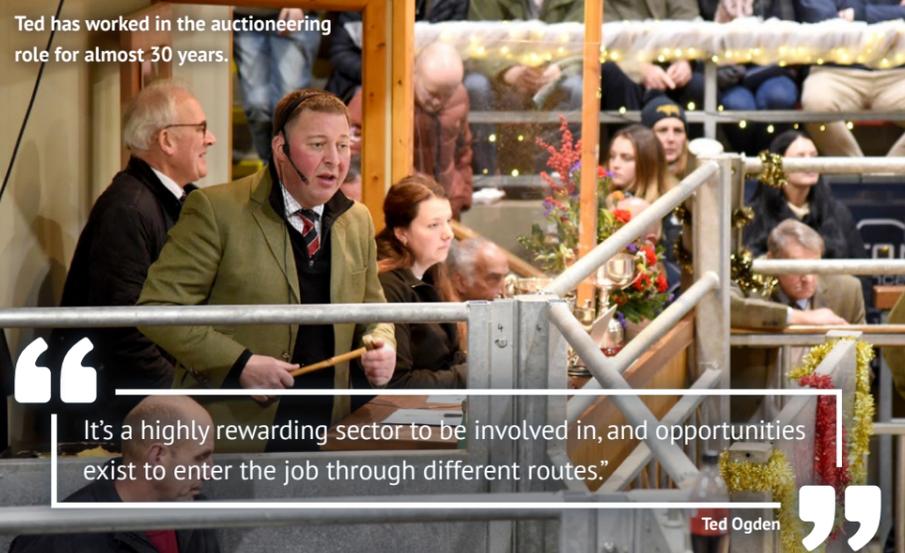
Taking on his new role as NSA Northern Region Chair Ted also believes will present the opportunity to help farmers by sharing their views with NSA Committees. His involvement with the association goes back more than 20 years.

Ted explains: "Working in Cumbria I came across a heartbeat of great people involved with NSA. Over the years this involvement has grown and I joined the regional committee. All the companies I have worked for have prioritised attendance at NSA events. Now I am pleased to take on the role of Chair.

"The most pressing issue in our area is the changing government policy and I hope to work to share the views of farmers within our region to push for a future that will be positive for farmers here and the UK as a whole, supporting the work of Phil Stocker and the NSA head office team."

Profile

- His farming family gave Ted an interest in livestock and trading.
- Ted has worked as an auctioneer across the north of England for approaching 30 years.
- As Craven Cattle Marts Livestock Sales Manager, Ted oversees the sale of more than 300,000 sheep and cattle per year.
- Ted was the previous winner of the Mart's the Heart Auctioneer of the Year award.
- Ted still helps on the family farm during busier parts of the sheep calendar.



Ted has worked in the auctioneering role for almost 30 years.

"It's a highly rewarding sector to be involved in, and opportunities exist to enter the job through different routes."

Ted Ogden



Ted has been involved with the organisation of NSA North Sheep for several years.

Former NSA Chair shares reminder to appreciate parents' knowledge

By Dan Phipps, former NSA Chair



I write this in a reflective frame of mind as I come to the end of my three-year term as NSA Chair.

When I was asked to write a letter to my younger self, my first thought was to tell myself to get a proper job that pays well for far less of my time! But this got me thinking about why I took the path I did. Being brought up on a farm my father managed, I developed or was born with a passion for farming and rural life, making my career path a pleasure.

I wouldn't change anything about where I am now but, looking back, I'd of told my younger self to not be so eager to leave home and explore the opportunity to farm alongside my parents.

First steps

On leaving agricultural college my parents and I looked at the possibility of tenant farming. One memorable farm was in the stunning location on the edge of Lake Vyrnwy, Powys. That would doubtlessly have led to a very different life to the one I have now.

I remember thinking at the time it would have been restrictive to my ambitions, ambitions that had been formed before conceiving the thought of tenant farming with my parents and so I pressed on with plans to travel.

I look back now and see what I had in my parents. It was them who instilled the passion and work ethic in me and made it all so much fun. I would have cherished the time more if I had recognised just how precious it was.

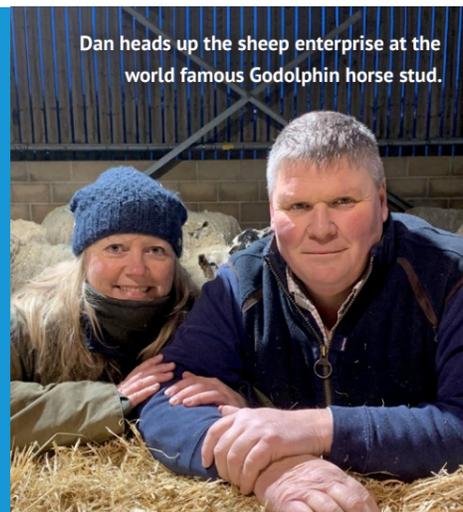
Letter to my younger self



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

Many have enthusiastically embraced this *Sheep Farmer* feature to pen a letter to their younger selves, sharing what they wish they'd known when they were starting out. The latest contributor is Dan Phipps, recently outgoing NSA Chair and former NSA Eastern Region Chair.

Dan heads up the sheep enterprise at the world famous Godolphin horse stud.



I'd tell my younger self to try harder at school just as my parents had continually told me! A lack of confidence meant I disappeared into the background at school. I thought it better to remain silent and be thought a fool than open my mouth and remove all doubt. But as my career progressed, I encountered too many issues for me to continue to remain silent.

I proceeded into farming with the assumption everyone thought what we do is important, wholesome and morally sound/wholesome and morally sound.

We are taught at a young age the 'Lord is my shepherd' and, as farmers, this picture of caring, courage and guidance from the bible is easily recognisable given that sheep are our most valuable asset and treated as a treasure.

I soon learnt not everyone shares these views. The realities of how we farm sheep have not changed, but the perception of what we are doing and our motivation is often distorted. As I've gotten older, I've realised the importance of challenging incorrect perceptions.

I would point out to my younger self it is important to be ready to adapt quickly and positively to change. It's inevitable and lurking around every corner. I would have readied myself for the knocks but reassured myself dealing with events positively leads to positive outcomes, applying the adage that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I'd remind myself though, to only change when it is required and use another adage, 'if it ain't broke don't fix it'.

Hard work

I remember being told hard work beats talent, when talent doesn't work hard. On the back of this I decided I would work hard in case I was lacking talent and hone some skills as I went. I would reassure myself this is a good policy. I can say without fear of contradiction, in farming it is hard work that gets you through. Talent is great, but sometimes things just need doing.

I would tell my younger self to get involved in the wider industry sooner than I did. I developed my involvement when I found myself in a room full of mature farmers. I'm sure on recollection I was only there as a driver, but the meeting was chaired by a senior industry figure who was determined to hear my views as a younger farmer.

It made me aware I had some different opinions from others present and highlighted the difficulty I had in standing up and being controversial. From that day forward I resolved to address this and commit to do my bit for the industry where I could. NSA has been integral in allowing me to do this. To work alongside others who do so much and give so much in support of our industry has been a blast.

Time spent with parents and siblings should be cherished, says Dan



Dan has much advice for his younger self.

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British Wool encourages next generation and improves member services



This will be the sixth year British Wool and the YFC national federations have worked together, extending the 2024 training offer to include all young farmers, regardless of level and how many courses they have previously attended.

These courses are held over two days, covering all the essential aspects of achieving a successful shearing season including the use of shearing equipment and hands-on shearing practice to develop your technique. British Wool partners Ulster Wool are also providing the same offer to young farmers in Northern Ireland.

The exclusive price YFC members pay for this training offer is £100 plus VAT and is valid for YFC members registering before 31st March 2024. This 50% discount includes participation in both machine and blade shearing courses.

Excellent fleece presentation starts at shearing and British Wool is extending its training offer for YFC members to participate in its wool handling course. This one-day course will be delivered by a competitive wool handler at a discounted price of only £50 plus VAT.

Next generation

Richard Schofield, Shearing Manager at British Wool, says: "We are once again delighted to be working with young farmers in supporting the training and development of the next generation of shearers and look forward to welcoming them onto our courses again. I'd encourage any interested YFC member to contact their national

federation before the 31st March closing date."

British Wool holds more than 100 courses throughout the UK, led by a team of registered and highly experienced instructors. Courses are generally delivered from April to August, with 800 attendees last year alone. Courses will be available to book on the British Wool website from mid-February.

In other news, British Wool has now stopped paying its producer members by cheque. British Wool staff have proactively been contacting those members who have no bank details by email and over the phone to update their accounts.

Wool payments

British Wool operates a 'self-billing' system. This means British Wool raises a VAT sales invoice on members' behalf and then British Wool pays this self-billed invoice to the member.

Many members have returned a completed self-billing agreement (SBA) however there remain several who have not responded. In recent months contact has been made with members who have supplied a VAT number but no SBA – if you have not responded and are VAT registered you must complete an SBA form for VAT to be included.

Gareth Jones of British Wool says: "These improvements are a key part of British Wool's efforts to reduce operating costs and limit environmental impact. Paying members by BACS means they have the added convenience



British Wool courses have been reduced for registered YFC members.

of receiving payment directly into their bank, normally generated the day after the wool is delivered and credited to the member's bank account within three working days."

Contact the British Wool member services team on 01274 688666 (option 1) or memberservices@britishwool.org.uk.

Contact details for YFC federations

- **England – Margaret Bennett**
margaret.bennett@nfyfc.org.uk
- **Wales – Lee Pritchard**
materiongwledig@yfc-wales.org.uk
- **Scotland – Penny Montgomerie**
penny@sayfc.org
- **Northern Ireland – Hayley Sloan**
hayley.sloan@yfcu.org



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Ensuring you have a healthy business is a sure fire way to success

By Brian Richardson, Virgin Money

As we enter 2024, there will be new challenges and opportunities, but forward planning will prime your business to be more resilient.

In England, new post-Brexit support policy, principally in the form of the Sustainable Farming Incentive, continues to be rolled out with several attempts by Defra to simplify its format and to make payments worthwhile applying for.

While uptake has improved, many farmers are taking a wait-and-see approach. Given this year we will see the basic payment scheme income reduced to just 50% of its historic value, and Defra planning further reductions, this must surely be creating an income gap for those farming businesses not yet taking advantage of the new support schemes.

Policy

In Scotland, policy has been slower to develop, with an anticipated rollout in 2025 of what appears to be a much simpler scheme than England's, which may be beneficial given the slow take up south of the border. Payment values and details are still to be finalised but at least there is an ongoing discussion and existing support payments remain largely unchanged in the meantime.

The lack of angst over changes to these support payments perhaps indicates a more stable period for the industry where, despite higher costs, output prices and demand have

been reasonable, particularly in the autumn-winter period of 2023.

Given the marginal profitability in the sheep sector, it is important clarity on future support arrangements comes as soon as possible.

Sadly, we may not see much more certainty in 2024 as we await a general election. In England, it will be for the administration of whatever complexion to confirm what future policy looks like and, crucially, what the budget will be.

We will continue to see a growing focus on the carbon net zero agenda in 2024. In our own survey of farming customers, 50% of respondents indicated they had undertaken a carbon audit, which is encouraging.

These audit tools are quickly becoming more comprehensive and user-friendly in how they operate and what they measure. Many producers now see them as part of their wider farm recording tools and recognise the benefits of keeping them up to date rather than simply a one-off exercise.

The sheep sector has a great story to tell on the environment and its net zero credentials, and it is important for the industry to document that story and demonstrate the good work conducted.

As part of our sponsorship at NSA North Sheep in 2023, we carried out a carbon audit on the host farm. Owner Willie Woodman certainly felt this had provided him with valuable information, and a clear understanding of what is meant by net zero and how his family enterprise could potentially reduce its carbon footprint.

There is perhaps less immediate demand from suppliers in the sheep industry for producers to

measure and report their carbon performance, but that pressure will come. I suspect it will climb up the agenda in the next two years as we start to focus on the legally binding targets for carbon reduction the Government has set for 2030, and the farming industry generally picks up pace driven by its customers.

Challenges

I am sure there will be many challenges in 2024 of one sort or another for the sheep sector and those best prepared will have the best chance of overcoming these. While there remains uncertainty over policy, resilience will be key – so getting your own business into as healthy a shape as it can be has never been more important.

All farms create a lot of data so understanding that, and comparing it with others, can identify where you have work to do and where there is opportunity to improve productivity and efficiency.

It is also a good time to talk with your professional advisors and support network, plus your bank manager, and get their input and advice, especially on the net zero question.

The UK sheep industry and all those involved can be proud of doing a fantastic job in producing high quality meat in a sustainable way at incredible value for money.

To keep it that way will require continued development and adaptation to whatever comes in the future. I am certain our UK sheep farmers will rise to the challenge as they have always done.

KPIs can be used as the building blocks of farm business profitability

By Josh Brook, ADAS

It is fair to say many farm businesses are guilty of not having specific performance targets or goals, which is why Defra is funding free advice as part of the Future Farming Resilience Fund.

ADAS is one of many providers of this service since October 2022. When reviewing a business, I ask what are your objectives? I am usually met with a long pause and a reply of remain farming, be profitable or to survive. These are great objectives, but how can they be achieved?

A key performance indicator (KPI) is a set target or goal a business is trying to achieve or maintain. KPIs can be used to help measure and analyse the performance of your farm enterprises.

This helps optimise the management and work towards achieving the business's overall objectives. KPIs enable a business to make informed decisions that can help maintain and improve productivity, efficiency and the health and welfare of the animals under the farms management.

Setting KPIs

When a business sets out individual KPIs, they must be SMART. Meaning each KPI must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

Formalising KPIs and discussing them with family members and colleagues is an important part of implementation. Having them written down will help the farm stick to what it is trying to achieve.

If a farm's overall objective is to survive the agricultural transition the business must take the time to understand which SMART KPIs will enable the farm to achieve this goal.

When reviewing a business, I look at how its profit can meet the cash demands of a business, otherwise known as the businesses profit requirement. This enables a business to understand what net profit must be generated to cover personal drawings, loan capital repayments, tax obligations, hire purchase repayments and capital expenditure.

This helps understand the business profit requirement and gives clarity on how losing the basic payment scheme income will impact the farms profitability. With this information you can understand the profit your business needs to generate to remain financially viable now and throughout the agricultural transition.

Once the profit target has been defined the business needs to assess what SMART KPIs must be set to enable it to achieve its goal of being profitable.

Review example

An example of a recent review conducted by ADAS was a mixed farm last year. They had a flock of 800 breeding ewes and a herd of 30 suckler cows. The business was mainly grassland with some arable ground that was also used to grow winter forage for the livestock.

Analysing the business performance highlighted some areas for improvement that could help it work towards its overall objective of surviving the agricultural transition.

The suckler herd was not profitable due to the high level of variable costs associated with the enterprise. The cattle were calving all year round, without a strict culling policy and the business was not currently utilising pregnancy testing. The sheep scanning rate had been reducing year on year and was then 152%.

Three KPIs emerged from the review:

1. Achieve a 95% pregnancy rate in the cattle available to calve in a 12-week block starting in January 2024.
2. Replace 50% of the bought in feed with homegrown forage within the year.
3. Increase the next sheep pregnancy scanning rate to 180%.

The farm then broke these down further to identify the step-by-step process to achieving the KPIs. If the business achieved these KPIs it was calculated it could reduce its feed bill by £15,000, increase its cattle enterprises gross margins by approximately £30,000 and increase its sheep enterprises gross margin by approximately £24,120.

This highlights the importance in taking the time to break it down, do the maths and set SMART KPIs.



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Mr Richardson advises using carbon audits as part of wider farm recording tools.

Supporting livestock traceability for effective disease management

By Sarah Measom, Livestock Information Ltd

Disease knows no bounds and among livestock it can have devastating consequences, affecting farm businesses, disrupting the food supply chain and damaging trade and consumer trust.

It requires the whole farming industry to take a firm stance towards enhancing disease management, part of which is down to improved livestock traceability. The Livestock Information Service (LIS) aims to do just that – transform the way we capture and manage livestock movement data, in as close to real time as possible, to build resilience against disease.

Technology already serves many purposes within agriculture and has seen considerable growth over the past decade in its intelligence and capability. It has also become more accessible for most, whether that be through funding and grants, or through wider use and understanding.

The use of electronic identification for sheep production has been associated with a significant return on investment for many producers. Despite the initial investment, the technology is associated with reduced labour costs and allows for informed individual animal management, supporting overall flock performance.

The digital era in agriculture is upon us and there will inevitably be increased reliance on the use of data captured using innovative technology. It therefore comes as no surprise sheep movement recording is shifting towards a digital reporting system. While some may be fearful, there are countless opportunities associated with recording sheep movements digitally with the LIS.

Traceability

Livestock traceability is the ability to track an animal or group of animals during all stages of its life. It identifies the holding where the animal is kept, assembled or disposed of and records the movement of animals between premises.

The ability to provide timely, accurate and relevant information on animal movements for statutory reporting purposes can help to minimise the impact of a disease outbreak or any associated food safety concerns.

Traceability of meat has become increasingly important to consumers over recent years, with an interest in able to determine exactly where the food they are buying comes from. It enables



Using LIS allows real-time movement monitoring.

them to make decisions based on ethics and environmental issues. It can also provide insights into animal welfare and the quality of the product. Having full traceability puts more trust in the producer.

Aside from being able to record sheep, goat and deer movement on LIS, there are two new capabilities that launched in December 2023.

Collaboration

The new UK view service has significantly improved the availability of traceability data for the Animal and Plant Health Agency, providing a single consolidated view of sheep, goat and deer movements via a collaboration between the official English, Welsh and Scottish livestock traceability services.

It is important to note there is no change to how the data is being captured. Movements for these species will continue to be reported and recorded in the usual way by the LIS, ScotEID and EIDCymru traceability services. The UK view will simply collate and display the data more efficiently so it can be used more effectively.

The second new capability to LIS is the ability for a registered farm vet to digitally record a vet attestation for sheep keepers on the platform. An abattoir user can then view that attestation before approving export to the EU.

This new development comes following the update from Defra regarding the requirement of a veterinary attestation from 13th December 2023 for all livestock keepers who produce livestock intended for the food chain and export to the EU.

This ensures biosecurity standards on-farm are adhered to. Those in a farm assurance scheme

are already covered by their regular farm visits so should check guidance from Defra for more details.

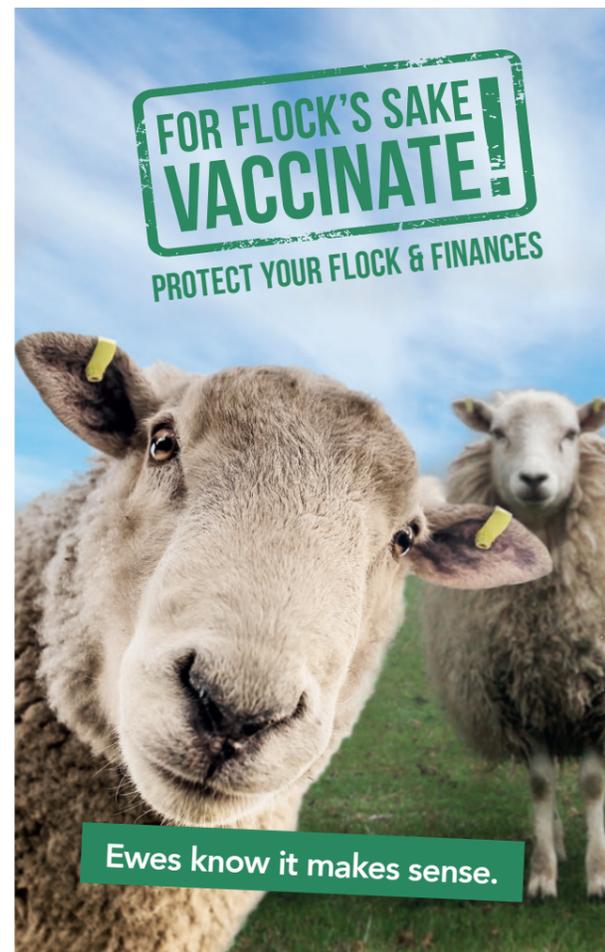
In the UK we have some of the highest meat quality and safety standards in the world and the data provided by LIS will allow livestock producers to stand out from the rest and help to build resilience to the sheep sector.

Want to join the 6,500+ users who are already using LIS? It's free to sign up, all you need is your registered CPH number and the email address associated with it.

More information at www.livestockinformation.org.uk/help-and-support.

Advantages of digital reporting

- Report moves from a mobile, tablet or desktop as soon as they happen.
- You can print out your online movement document to accompany the animal, but the move will have been accounted for on the system.
- While the digital record is reported straight away, it can take up to 28 days for a paper movement to be received and processed.
- Faster accurate online movement data supports decision making associated with disease management and helps control disease spread.
- You can use your LIS account as an online holding register too.



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Update on prevention, treatment and control of lameness in sheep

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun 

In recent years, considerable efforts have been made to reduce the prevalence of lameness across the UK by focussing research into the common causes of lameness in sheep, and in disseminating evidence based and practical advice.

This has been successful with national prevalence now reported to be below 5% on average. But, there are still many farms with persistent issues and the industry has aspired to reduce the national prevalence further to below 2% as a rolling average.

There are several causes of lameness in sheep and veterinary advice should be sought to ensure an optimal approach is taken to diagnosis, treatment, prevention and control. Several infectious causes of lameness require treatment with antibiotics, following the axiom as little as possible, but as much as necessary. Lameness should form a key component of all flock health plans with regular review of treatments and management practices, and a focus on responsible antibiotic use.

Consequences

Lame sheep experience pain and therefore have a reduced willingness to stand and feed. Consequently, growing lambs may stop growing or lose weight, and breeding ewes may have fewer or smaller lambs. There are also reductions in milk quality and volume, increasing the risk of neonatal lamb infections and deaths through a lack of colostrum, and an increase in the risk of mastitis in affected ewes.

Thin ewes are also under metabolic stress and more at risk of metabolic diseases, such as pregnancy toxaemia (twin lamb disease) or at an increased risk of infection from other causes due to an insufficient energy supply to optimise immunity.

The various estimates produced on the cost of lameness vary widely and quickly become out of date. But in 2017, the cost estimates for lameness varied from £3.90 to £6.35 per ewe in the flock, depending on the severity of lameness. This means in a flock of 1,000 ewes, lameness could be costing at least £3,900 to £6,350 per year.

The bottom line is lame sheep cost money and produce fewer outputs than healthy ones. Therefore you should aim to reduce the number of lame sheep to the absolute minimum.

Access Moredun factsheets at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-moredun.



Key points

- The main causes of lameness in sheep are interdigital dermatitis, footrot and contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), all of which are infectious and contagious.
- The treatment, prevention and control of different foot lesions can vary, so an accurate diagnosis is important to deal with it effectively.
- Prompt antibiotic treatments are needed for the treatment of most lameness cases.
- Foot trimming of lame sheep is no longer recommended. Doing so reduces the chances of recovery and increases the risk of infective bacteria transmission.
- The five point plan aims to control lameness by establishing immunity, building resilience and reducing the disease challenge.
- Robust biosecurity is a key component to control.
- A holistic whole flock plan should be developed in conjunction with a vet to prevent, manage, control and treat lameness successfully.




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Positive outcomes of recording lamb losses to spur future collaborative research



With lambing being one of the busiest and intensive periods on a sheep farm, there often isn't time to take stock of what is happening until long after the event.

And when lambing is less successful than desired, it can be difficult to identify why.

While it can be disheartening to think about recording ewe or lamb deaths and the reasons for them, it can help identify issues and prompt action to tackle them – as seen at one of Scotland's Monitor Farms and subsequently prompting an innovative new lambing health project.

Case study

Richard McCornick and family run the 500-acre (200ha) beef and sheep unit at Barnbuckle, Lochfoot, Dumfriesshire, and have used data to identify flock performance issues. Sheep numbers increased last year with 800 ewes and 150 ewe lambs put to the tup in the autumn. The business is focused on improving performance and the farm's integrated land management plan highlighted lambing losses as an area for attention.

As a result, a flock tally sheet recording losses on a whiteboard in the lambing shed has helped the farm identify the main causes of loss. It has also led to a deeper investigation into colostrum quality and failure to transfer passive immunity from ewe to lambs.

To tackle losses this lambing, Mr McCornick is going to focus on ewe nutrition and health, colostrum quality and lamb immunity through a collaborative project between Monitor Farm Scotland, Livestock Health Scotland, the Stewartry Veterinary Centre and Glasgow University.

Ali Haggerty, a researcher and Barnbuckle's vet, says: "Using a holistic approach, we will look at ewe body condition score and nutrition, then sample ewe colostrum and blood test their lambs to see how it marries up, as well as investigate lamb deaths."

The aim is to increase lamb survival rates, producing more lambs for sale.

"The 'board of death' is a depressing thing to do, but it is good motivation for change and identifies where you can quickly make a difference," she says. "We had broad categories such as abortion, stillbirth, predation, watery mouth and so on, and a tally mark system. It's not fancy, but it is easy to use and better than having to think back or use intuition."

"The whiteboard highlighted quite a lot of the lamb losses last year were around lambing, from things such as watery mouth or joint ill. Lambs are born without any antibodies, so they rely on that first few hours of receiving colostrum from their mother for immunity in the first few weeks of life. By improving their immunity, we will have more, healthier lambs on the ground."

Ewe nutrition

While Ms Haggerty is cautious the study will only be a snapshot in time, she says there are main focus areas. Looking at ewe nutrition will be key, assessed through consistent body condition scoring throughout the year and metabolic profiling at key times, particularly two to three weeks before the start of lambing.

This will look at whether the available feed is adequate and being utilised fully by ewes, vital to produce enough high-quality colostrum in the lamb's first few hours of life.

"The lamb's gut is only permeable to the antibodies from colostrum for the first six to twelve hours of life. By 24 hours old, the channels in the gut wall have closed completely, so colostrum at that time will not be absorbed into the body and provide local gut immunity at best."

"It's also a high fat product, which is crucial for lambing outside – providing energy to keep warm. To give lambs the best start, proper colostrum management is important," she says.

Taking colostrum samples from ewes and, later on, blood sampling lambs will assess adequate passive transfer of immunity. All this data, plus details of the ewe and her lambing performance, will be collated, with results expected to be available in early summer.

"We aren't changing too much on the farm in the run up to lambing, as we want to capture what is going on and be able to assess that. While Mr McCornick lambs indoors, I expect some aspects of the results to be equally applicable to outside lambing, and will focus attention on just how important colostrum is."

Tips for success

- Use ewe BCS and blood profiling to assess energy and protein levels.
- Ensure ewes have clean teats and fleece around them as bugs can prevent colostrum antibodies crossing the gut, impairing immunity.
- All lambs need 50ml/kg colostrum in the first few hours and up to 200ml in the first 24 hours.
- Clean feeding equipment using hot soapy water and a brush to remove the fatty scum that accumulates. Teats and tubes that are cracked or perished harbour bacteria and need replacing.
- Use plenty of bedding and a dry disinfectant between pen occupants if a total clear out is not possible. Power washing increases moisture in the environment which pathogens favour.
- Where lambs and ewes have a bad or assisted lambing, don't be afraid to use anti-inflammatories.
- Review your lambing set-up to ensure its easy to work in under pressure. Simple, inexpensive changes can often make a big difference.

Survey highlights tips for rearing cade lambs

By Nicky Naylor, Harper Adams University

There is a wealth of research into the way dairy farms artificially rear calves, but limited information is known as to the way sheep farmers rear surplus lambs.

There are numerous reasons cade lambs come about - ewes not having sufficient milk, death, large litters so it's inevitably some lambs will need to be raised away from the ewe.

Litter size is a key factor for boosting the number of lambs being reared artificially, with breed, nutritional status and grass availability having a major effect on litter size at scanning. Triplets are more likely to have different behaviours to single and doubles, due to being slower and more likely to have sucking difficulties, as well as the smaller birth weights potentially affecting growth and finish times.

Feeding lambs

Harper Adams University distributed a survey in 2021 to investigate responses to cade lambs. Results indicated the most common method of feeding was by bottle, which is labour-intensive. The number of lambs artificially reared per year impacted on the type of feeding equipment used. Automatic feeders tend to be used when rearing a large number of lambs, but this method is costlier to install, which could explain why bottles seem to be most popular.

Despite the additional cost, automatic adlib feeders allow lambs to feed more frequently – a more natural method for the lamb – which can see daily liveweights in excess of 300g/day with lambs achieving 16kg by five weeks of age.

Sheep milk powder was commonly offered, but some used cow or sheep milk, both have been proven to rear lambs effectively. In the early weeks of life, lambs are only able to digest nutrients contained within milk. Therefore not supplying a sufficient milk source could result in nutrient deficiencies, delaying days to slaughter and reducing carcass value.



Automatic feeders help manage cade lambs



Bottle feeding lambs is labour intensive.

Best practice

Weighing quantities and using a thermometer to check milk temperature is advised. While some milk powders can be fed cold, studies show feeding inconsistently can affect performance, therefore measuring both quantity and temperature can improve

performance, especially if multiple people are involved with feeding.

There is often the perception rearing lambs artificially is not profitable, with 62.5% of respondents believing this. Cade lamb performance and profitability is affected by the way in which lambs are fed, the length of time for which lambs are offered milk, whether they are fed restricted or adlib and the perception of cade lamb rearing by the individual farmer.

With good farm practices and a consistent feeding programme, lambs can be successfully reared artificially, helping to increase the financial return.

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Understanding campylobacter abortions in sheep as prevalence increases

By Rudolf Reichel, APHA



Last lambing season saw campylobacter as the leading cause of sheep abortions in Great Britain, which is unusual as enzootic abortion in ewes (EAE) is generally the most common cause, followed by toxoplasmosis.

Campylobacter is a type of bacteria with several different species, of which some can cause food-borne illness in people, and abortions in sheep and cattle. In sheep, it is mostly associated with late term abortions or the birth of dead or weak lambs.

Abortion caused by campylobacter tends to peak every three to four years. The exact reason for this is unknown but is suspected to be due to the gradual replacement of immune animals with susceptible replacements.

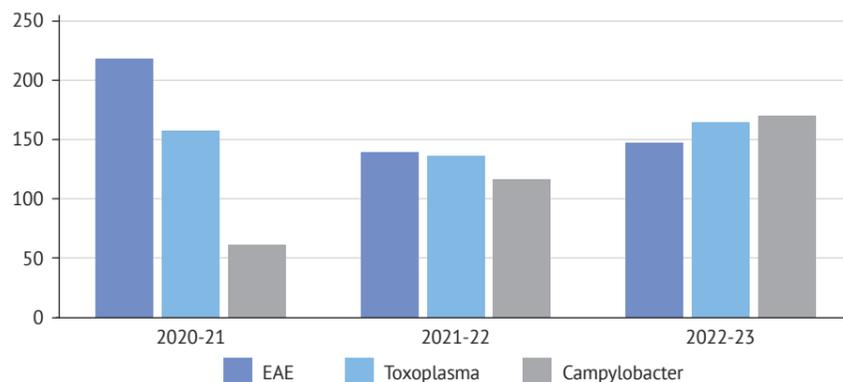
Up to 20% of the group may abort, but ewes generally remain well in themselves apart from a mild transient diarrhoea in some. An outbreak is usually confined to one lambing season, as exposed animals will develop immunity.

Biology

There are more than 20 species of campylobacter with *Campylobacter fetus* and *Campylobacter jejuni* the most common species associated with sheep abortions. Both may be carried in the intestines of asymptomatic sheep and infection can be introduced to flocks by carriers. *C. jejuni* may also be excreted by wild birds.

C. fetus was the most common species

Top three causes of ovine abortion in the UK over past three lambing seasons.



associated with ovine abortion the past season, accounting for 91% of campylobacter abortions (*C. jejuni* accounted for 5.6%).

Infected or carrier sheep shed the organism into the environment, and this can cause infection of other sheep. Shedding is intermittent and influenced by season, feed and grazing, and stress levels. The highest level of shedding is at lambing, weaning and movement onto new pasture. Active infection in ewes in late pregnancy leads to abortion storms.

A sheep becomes infected by ingesting contaminated feed and water. From infection to abortion takes seven to 25 days, and an outbreak can spread rapidly due to large numbers of the organism present in aborted material.

Ewes that aborted should be isolated away from others, and disposal of contaminated bedding and abortion material is important to limit the spread. It is also important to keep feeding troughs and feeding areas clean and

prevent contamination with bird droppings. Remove susceptible animals from areas that may be contaminated.

Contamination

Biosecurity measures should be implemented to prevent contamination and spread to adjacent flocks and wildlife vectors. The organism can spread easily by vehicles and wellingtons and also remain viable for several days on pasture and bedding. Bought in stock should not be mixed with the home flock during pregnancy.

Following infection, ewes will develop immunity and will not abort again. Campylobacter species are potentially zoonotic so those in direct and indirect contact with aborted animals should take suitable hygiene precautions.

It is important to get all abortions investigated as there are several different causes and there are no obvious signs to provide a clear indication. In the case of campylobacter, the diagnosis is made at a veterinary laboratory on samples collected from an aborted lamb. Please discuss abortion investigation with your vet.

It's also worth consulting your vet on possible measures and treatment to prevent further abortions. Options are, however, limited as the infection has usually spread through the group by the time of the first abortions, and there is little evidence that flock antibiotic treatment is of benefit.

Unlike EAE and toxoplasma, there are no current UK licenced campylobacter vaccines, but one can be imported under a special import licence. The imported vaccine has been used successfully on several UK farms. Another option is to have an autogenous vaccine prepared from the strain present on your farm. If in doubt, discuss options with your vet.



Circular target lesions from the liver of a campylobacter-aborted lamb.

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Ensuring hygienic conditions in lambing pens reduces the risk of infection.

Key focus areas to ensure lambing habits give your stock the best start

By Alana Jackson, Cain Farm Vets



Increased scrutiny of antibiotic use around lambing time has provided some farms with a good opportunity to fine-tune protocols, change lambing-time habits and review neonatal lamb care on their farm – but are there still things you could tweak?

Neonatal care boils down to two critical points – colostrum and hygiene. Colostrum is rich in nutrients such as protein, energy, minerals and vitamins but also in providing non-nutrient components including growth factors, enzyme inhibitors and immunoglobulins (antibodies).

Lambs are born with no protective antibodies in their circulation at birth, known as agammaglobulinemic, and are naive to infection. At birth, lambs can absorb antibodies from their gut (from the colostrum feed) and transfer these into their circulation. However, this ability to absorb declines from birth, ceasing by 24 hours.

Colostrum advice

To ensure the best start for newborn lambs, it is recommended they get 50ml/kg of colostrum as their first feed within two hours, with a total of 200ml/kg of colostrum within the first 24 hours.

With no circulating antibodies at birth, lambs are susceptible to infection and therefore hygiene is very important. Lambs born into hygienic environments are exposed to lower bacterial loads, reducing the risk of disease. Getting enough good quality colostrum into them as soon as possible is key to protecting them from infections and/or disease.

Keeping feeding equipment properly disinfected between uses can be challenging in a hectic lambing shed. But, if not kept clean, you could be inadvertently dosing vulnerable lambs with bacteria via the tube, teat or bottle. Colostrum and milk leave a residual layer (of fat and protein) in equipment, in which bacteria grow and can form a biofilm, which can protect them from some disinfectants. Extreme build-up results in a white scum, feeling slimy or rough.



First, rinse equipment with lukewarm water – this helps remove any residual milk solids. Using hot water first can encourage the fat and protein to stick to the equipment's surface. Then scrub equipment with soap and hot water. Leave to soak in a disinfectant, for example peracetic acid or hypochlorite, for as long as possible. Finally, rinse with water and allow to drip-dry. If you don't have enough time to let it dry, use equipment that has been left soaking, but rinse thoroughly with water before use.

We recommend using 5% peracetic acid, diluted down to 200ppm (parts per million) as your soaking chemical. To create this dilution, add 8mls of 5% peracetic acid to a 2,000ml container of water. Refresh the soaking bath every two to three days. Please check the concentration of your chosen disinfectant to ensure this dilution concentration is met.

Feeding equipment

Avoid sharing feeding equipment between lambs. If two lambs require tubing, use two separate, disinfected tubes.

Have separate sick lamb feeding equipment to avoid passing infection to healthy lambs. This is especially important for lambs with e.coli watery mouth, as the design of the lamb tube makes a mini 'cup', which could scoop up bacteria from a sick lamb's stomach and transfer to another lamb.

Hygiene when lambing ewes is also important. Realistically having clean hands is hard to achieve, especially when you've caught the ewe first. Disposable arm-length gloves are therefore a must and can be carried in your pockets for easy access. Obstetrical gel should always be applied liberally to aid examination of any lambing and help reduce the risk of trauma to the ewe.

There is no licensed anti-inflammatory/pain killer for sheep in the UK. But most vets would recommend using a long-acting anti-inflammatory under the cascade, to provide pain relief following a difficult lambing.

Sheep are prey animals and manifest pain in quite subtle ways. The provision of pain relief to ewes after a difficult lambing improves their welfare and ability to care for their lambs. Speak to your vet about providing pain relief for your ewes.



Dip navels in strong iodine, ideally twice within the first 24 hours. Sometimes ewes lick the iodine off lambs' navels, so repeating the iodine dip will improve navel disinfection and drying. Dipping navels coats the navel better than spraying. We'd suggest using little containers, like a ketchup bottle, which have a relatively wide mouth/opening, are cheap and have a lid so are less likely to be knocked over and spill.

If colostrum quality is poor, or if newborn lambs are not fed enough, they may not absorb sufficient levels of immunoglobulins, which is termed failure of passive transfer (FPT). To reduce the risk of FPT, consider the quality of colostrum the ewe is producing, and how much (volume) lambs are getting.

Ewe's colostrum quality can be measured using an optical or digital brix refractometer. Good quality lamb colostrum should be a minimum of 26.5% on the brix scale, with higher scores indicating higher immunoglobulin content.

Supplementation

We recommend you feed lambs at high risk of FPT their first colostrum feed, including:

1. Any lamb that has an 'abnormal' birth for example been pulled or mixed-up twins.
2. Weakly lambs and triplets – test the colostrum quality of the ewe, and feed all the lambs to ensure all lambs get enough colostrum, rather than one lamb getting more than the rest.
3. Any lambs from ewes with teat/udder conformation abnormalities, for example, ewes with big/low hanging teats.

If you are unsure of colostrum transfer, healthy lambs under seven days of age can be blood sampled by your vet and tested for blood total protein. This correlates with blood immunoglobulin levels. Lambs with FPT are likely to have low blood total protein.

Most powdered colostrum is marketed as a colostrum supplement rather than a replacer. Quality varies, so look at the weight of colostrum powder per feed, not the total liquid volume fed. If the artificial colostrum contains low immunoglobulin levels, filling up the lamb with poor-quality colostrum may do more harm than good. If the lamb is full (with poor colostrum) this will reduce the lamb's willingness to suck the ewe, potentially further reducing antibody intakes.

One recent study compared multiple artificial colostrum products, assessing the immunoglobulin levels they provided per feed, finding some popular products give very low levels of immunoglobulins. Ask your vet for advice on which artificial colostrum powder they would recommend.

Being prepared ahead of lambing time is a great starting point to make sure you can maintain a hygienic setting within your lambing shed. If you have any questions please speak to your vet.



Key improvement areas

- Clean lamb feeding equipment.
- Good hygiene when lambing ewes.
- Provide pain relief for ewes.
- Dip navels in strong iodine – ideally twice within the first 24 hours.
- Ensure lambs have good colostrum quality.
- Use good quality artificial colostrum if required.



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Update on bluetongue virus – signs, symptoms, risks, rules and regulations

By Rudolf Reichel, APHA



Bluetongue continues to be a concern for the sheep sector, with continued reports of positive cases in the control zones.

At the time of writing, the four cases confirmed in sheep were discovered due to proactive surveillance visits from The Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA).

Bluetongue affects all ruminants, and camelids such as llamas and alpacas, and can be spread long distances by wind dispersal of culicoides midges. The most likely cause of the infections in England are from midges infected with bluetongue virus serotype 3 (BTV-3) that have blown across from continental Europe.

Midge bites are the main way for the virus to spread to livestock. But only a small proportion of midges can transmit the virus. Once a midge has picked up bluetongue it will be a carrier for the rest of its life. There is currently no evidence the virus is circulating in the UK's midge population.

Bluetongue can also be spread through the import or movement of infected animals and their germplasm (semen and ova, or embryos).

Surveillance

APHA is undertaking surveillance testing of susceptible species on premises within the temporary control zones (TCZs) – 10km zones around premises with confirmed bluetongue cases. On a surveillance visit, APHA checks records, and inspects and blood samples all ruminants and camelids. Unless they are the offspring of positive animals, lambs and kids up to 12 weeks of age are not being sampled while midge activity is low,

but may be sampled when midge populations and activity increase in warmer weather.

Animals closest to where infection has been identified, larger flocks/herds and other higher risk groups have been prioritised. Zoos and wildlife centres with susceptible species are also subject to surveillance.

Culling

Infected animals have until recently been humanely culled to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Where animals are culled for disease control purposes, compensation will be paid.

In colder temperatures midge activity reduces. Given the reduced risk of transmission, the Chief Veterinary Officer is now considering on a case-by-case basis whether it is necessary to humanely cull infected animals to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Where animals are spared, they will be placed under restriction and risk mitigation measures such as treatment with insecticides or repellents will be required.

Movement of animals out of the TCZ is not allowed unless it is a licensed move direct to a designated abattoir. Movements into or within the zone are only allowed under licence. Some short distance welfare moves may be allowed so keepers should plan ahead and apply early before the welfare concern becomes an issue. Producers can apply for licence to move out of the TCZ during the seasonally low vector period but will require pre-movement PCR and serology testing. Samples must be taken on or after 18 January 2024.

There is currently no vaccine available for BTV-3, but pharmaceutical companies are investigating whether a vaccine could be produced in the future. Unfortunately, there is no cross-protection from other bluetongue strain vaccines.

Signs

Although current cases are geographically concentrated, it is important to look out for signs of disease and report any suspicion to APHA and consult your vet immediately.

Sheep are more likely to show obvious clinical signs than cattle if they become infected, but the impacts on susceptible animals can vary. Some show no clinical signs, while others can have productivity issues such as reduced milk yield. In the most severe cases it can be fatal for infected animals.

Lambs can become infected with bluetongue before birth if the dam is infected while pregnant.



Signs and symptoms

The main signs in sheep are:

- Ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose.
- Discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from mouth.
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, head, neck and coronary band (where the skin of the leg meets the horn of the foot).

Other signs include:

- Red skin and mucous membranes due to blood collecting beneath the surface of the skin.
- Fever.
- Lameness.
- Breathing problems.
- Abortion, foetal deformities and stillbirths.
- Sudden death.

The clinical signs in cattle are similar but are likely to be milder.

Signs of infection include lambs born small, weak, deformed or blind, death of lambs within a few days of birth or stillbirths.

Housing stock, especially high value stock, in midge proof accommodation (screening mesh with holes less than 0.5mm, impregnated with insecticide and with positive air pressure) has been suggested to reduce the risk of infection. But this may not be practical or cost effective.

It's advisable to prevent farm dogs and pets accessing aborted material and afterbirth as although rare, BTV can be spread through consuming infected material.

More at www.gov.uk/bluetongue.



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'Remain vigilant' as rising cases of Schmallenberg virus sweep the UK

By Rudolf Reichel, APHA



With an increasing number of Schmallenberg virus cases confirmed in the UK, APHA is reminding sheep farmers to remain vigilant and be aware of the signs.

At the time of writing, APHA has noted an increase in suspect Schmallenberg samples submitted. Lab testing has confirmed cases in Worcestershire, North Somerset, South Gloucester, Dorset, Devon, Herefordshire and Oxfordshire.

Early lambing flocks and spring calving herds are more likely to be affected as animals were pregnant during the risk period in autumn. Midges that spread the infection are most abundant and active in late summer and autumn. During the autumn APHA also received reports of acute disease in cattle – symptoms included milk drop and malaise – and poor fertility in sheep flocks.

Symptoms

In sheep, goats and cattle, the disease is most commonly associated with malformed animals born alive or dead at term, or aborted following infection of the dam. Malformations observed externally include bent limbs, fixed joints (arthrogryposis), and deformities of the spine or jaw. This may involve all limbs and spine, or only some limbs or joints. Post-mortem examination may detect brain deformities and abnormalities of the spinal cord.



Dead lamb with bent limbs and fixed joints due to SBV.

Adult sheep and goats are unlikely to show signs of clinical disease, but acute clinical disease in adult cattle presents as fever, reduced milk yield, inappetence, loss of body condition and diarrhoea.

The virus was first identified in Germany and Belgium in 2011 and spread to the UK in 2012 via infected windblown midges. Following infection, animals usually develop immunity. This results in peaks and troughs of incidents, with the disease disappearing for four to five years, and then peaking again once immunity has waned. Peaks were recorded in 2017 and again at the end of 2023 and early 2024.

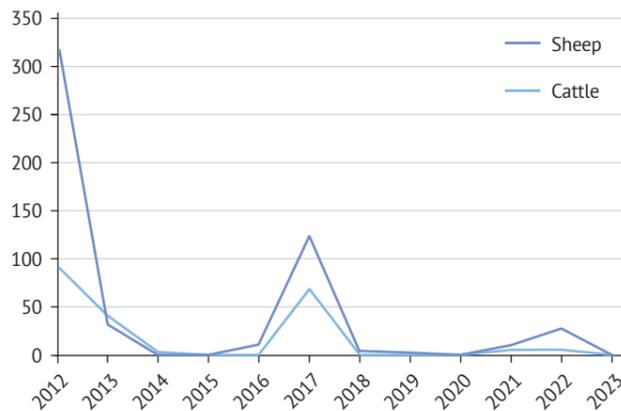
Malformed lambs and calves may lead to lambing or calving difficulties, possibly requiring a caesarean. Those delivered alive with severe malformations must be euthanased for welfare reasons.

Investigation

The advice from APHA is not to assume a malformed lamb or calf is due to SBV, but to investigate and confirm the cause. Malformations can be caused by a range of diseases such as congenital swayback, border disease and even bluetongue, so please contact your vet to discuss investigation.

APHA continues to offer free-of-charge testing on samples from lambs, kids and calves born with arthrogryposis or other musculoskeletal deformities. A fresh brain sample – ideally the brain stem – will be tested. The submission of a foetus and placenta may be preferable to enable investigation of other causes of abortion, in addition to Schmallenberg without additional charge. Contact your local veterinary investigation centre for more information.

Number of SBV cases diagnosed by APHA per year in the UK.



Vaccines were available after the initial outbreak, but none are currently commercially available in the UK. Postponing sheep mating until later in the season is probably the most practical solution for minimising Schmallenberg risk. But, midge numbers may remain high until late autumn with the current warmer weather patterns so stay alert and remain vigilant.

Further SBV information at www.nadis.org.uk/disease-a-z.

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AHDB's end of year grass review discusses if the grass was greener in 2023

By Katie Evans, AHDB 

For many, the heart of their operations lies in the growth and quality of their grass – so understanding the intricacies of grass growth and quality is crucial for a thriving agricultural enterprise.

AHDB Forage for Knowledge farmers submitted grass growth and quality data on a weekly basis in 2023. This helped produce data for AHDB's 2023 end-of-season review, which delved into the factors influencing grass growth and quality in the UK.

One of the defining factors in the UK's agricultural landscape is the unpredictable weather, and the 2023 season was no exception. Farmers across the country faced challenges because of wetter-than-average conditions in some regions and drought-like conditions in others. These variations influenced the timing and vigour of grass growth, making it essential for farmers to stay vigilant and adapt their management practices to mitigate weather-related challenges.

Looking back to spring 2023, grass growth figures were looking positive going into April and May, with growth peaking at 101kgDM/ha/day. April rainfall totals were generally close to average; it was drier in some northern areas but rather wet in parts of the south and east. At the end of April, we saw an average metabolisable energy (ME) of 12.2MJ/kgDM. It then began to drop.

Similarly, crude protein levels declined from March (24.3%) to July (21%). It then increased each month, reaching 24.4% at the start of November. This may have been related to the reduced fertiliser usage across the grazing platform during the dry summer periods.

The average ME for September and October was 12 MJ/kgDM, and crude protein was averaging 23%, but dry matter only averaged 16%. This gave farms a chance to extend their grazing season, but supplementary feed was needed to meet the dry matter intake requirements.

Looking forward

Farmers can use Grass Check GB website and the AHDB Weather Hub to stay up to date with the latest information on air temperatures, rainfall, relative humidity, sunshine duration, wind speed, soil moisture, soil temperature and solar radiation. Soil testing and analysis should be a regular practice on every farm to ensure the right nutrients are available for optimal grass growth. The new year is an excellent time to review soil test results and consider amendments or adjustments in your nutrient management plan for the upcoming season.

Effective grazing management is another cornerstone of grass growth and quality. Season-long, rotational and adaptive grazing systems



Well managed grasslands provide the most efficient feed.

all have their place in different farming systems. Reflect on the grazing strategies you employed in 2023 and assess their impact on grass health. Adjustments in stocking rates, grazing periods and paddock sizes may be necessary to achieve better results in the next season.

Well-managed grassland provides the cheapest feed throughout the year, either as grazed grass or silage. Making the most of grass on your farm offers a huge opportunity to increase profits in a sustainable way, hence why commitment to optimising grass growth and quality is an investment in both the future success of your farm and the broader agricultural community.

AHDB has a broad range of tools available to help with decision-making and provide support throughout the seasons. Alongside the Forage for Knowledge dashboard, Grass Check GB and Weather Hub, there is also the Recommended Grass & Clover Lists and RB209 Nutrient Management Guide. These are available to all levy payers and updated regularly.

More at www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/forage-for-knowledge.



GrasscheckGB offers information on grass growth and quality across the country.

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Following the flock

We visit Angus, Herefordshire and Cumbria to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Peter Myles

NSA Scottish Region Chair, Angus



I have never thought of myself as a plumber. In fact when it comes to DIY my wife does it all to save on the mistakes of my ham-fisted efforts.

Plumbing and electrical work need to be done by experts. But, after having a polytunnel built for my tup hogs, friends told me there was nothing to putting in a water trough so I set to it. I helped with the groundwork and laid the floor myself, so what was a wee bit of plastic pipe and a few fittings for a man of my calibre?

YouTube was nervously checked repeatedly, it was discussed ad nauseum with family and planned out in detail. While discussing with a friend, he suggested when it came to joints and junction fitting I build a manhole big enough to get into if anything needs fixing.

Standing next to a stack of empty sheep lick buckets he said: "Just bury one of these. We can make holes in the side and they have a fixed lid."

With some smugness this was done. I could get my hands in and tighten the fittings then connected everything. Then came the moment of truth. I turned on the water and, voila, clean water trickled into the trough and my new standpipe flowed to the required standard with no leaks.

The tups are now enjoying their new refreshing environment and I feel I have attained my first ever boy scout plumbing/recycling badge.



A new venture put Peter's plumbing skills to the test.



Richard promotes the benefits of outwintering stock on cover crops.

Richard Vines

NSA Marches Region Chair, Herefordshire



The late summer and autumn here, like much of the UK, saw continued precipitation becoming monotonous.

Most straw was baled and cleared which is making a valuable contribution to cashflow. Good hay was hard to gather but with plenty of great haylage we should be ok for winter feeding. We have established fresh leys and now it is drier they are benefiting the ram and ewe lambs.

The weather has helped establishment of the cover crops upon which the in-lamb ewes spend the winter and early spring months feeding their developing lambs prior to March lambing. Mixes this year include fodder radish, forage rye, berseem clover and phacelia, with addition of turnips.

Principally used as a cover overwinter and an entry for spring root crops and dwarf beans, they provide a nutritious mixed bite for outwintered ewes and ram lambs. Where required the addition of haylage in ring feeders balances the diet.

With the increase in SFI and encouragement for green cover crop overwinter, I recommend looking at opportunities to utilise arable mixed cropping where available. By grazing extensively you avoid ugly scenes of poaching. In many cases the landlords require a green cover to be left afterwards if grazing in early winter, for scheme compliance.

The reports of bluetongue and Schmallenberg are very worrying and with lambing ahead we hope to not be affected but send our thoughts to anyone dealing with the effects.

Viv Lewis

NSA Northern Region Chair (outgoing), Cumbria

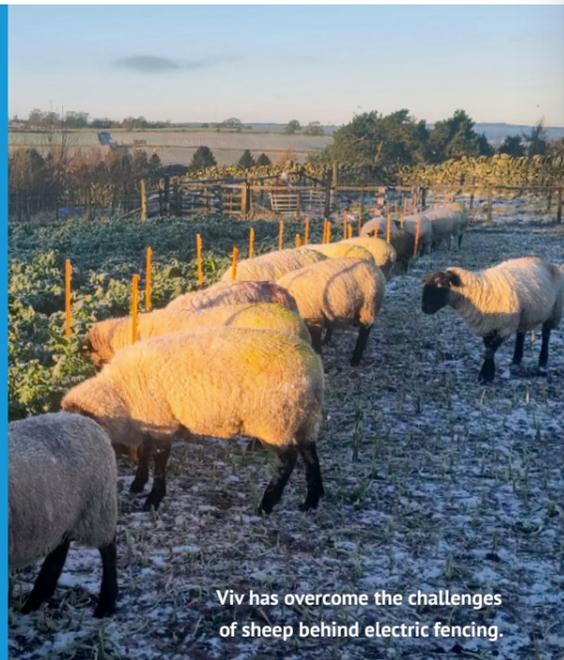


For the first time we are grazing our sheep on a mixture of kale, rape and stubble turnips and they are doing well.

It took us two days (and lots of expletives) to stop the sheep breaking through the electric fencing but we've finally got them bossed, as they say here. It would have helped if we had checked the solar energizer first. As neither Richard nor I like touching the fence, we didn't find out for a while the internal battery wasn't working. Moral of the story – check your kit before you use it and buy an electric fence tester. Mine's on order!

When you read this I will have stepped down as Chair of NSA Northern Region. I was surprised and overwhelmed to be asked, farming part-time with a small flock, so I guess my knowledge of upland farm policy and desire to influence Defra had something to do with it. That's the beauty and brilliance of NSA – it's a broad church and encompasses a wide variety of sheep farmers.

NSA Northern Region remains strong. We had a fantastic NSA North Sheep last year, have new young members on the committee who bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm, and attendance at meetings has picked up. I have thoroughly enjoyed myself and leave the region in the capable hands of our new Chair, Ted Ogden.



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