

# SHEEP FARMER

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A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

**NSA FLAGSHIP EVENT**  
FULL PREVIEW FOR NSA SHEEP 2024  
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FARM PROFILE INSIDE  
**SUSTAINABLE FARMING**  
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### FREE DELIVERY OF TOP QUALITY RAMS THROUGHOUT THE UK

## Confirmed elections a welcome sight

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



Announcement of a General Election on Thursday 4th July ends speculation rumbling in Parliament.

Despite a rush of pre-election announcements to either impress or get things over the line, there comes a point when uncertainty gets in the way so at least we now know we go to the ballot box in early July and then start to progress again towards a sustainable sheep farming future.

Red Tractor Assurance is a good example of uncertainty delaying progress, which is why after thinking very hard, NSA sent its letter to the Red Tractor ownership group saying it had no confidence in any willingness to change and better serve the needs of the sheep industry.

It wasn't difficult to come to that realisation – it's been building for years – but it's not pleasant and can be misinterpreted as a personal attack. I'm proud the NSA English Committee, NSA Board, and of course our Red Tractor Beef & Lamb Board member all stood in firm agreement.

For years our concerns haven't been listened to. Harmonisation across the sectors has been buoyed with a refusal to accept sheep farms are very different to pig, poultry and dairy farms.

### Constraints

The Red Tractor structure has inhibited dialogue across the supply chain and denied space for debate. The Greener Farm Commitment, dreamt up because of a WWF commitment from a few of the supermarkets, without consultation of those delivering it – farmers – was the final straw.

It's still not clear where this will all end and we are just at the start of an industry-led consultation into future farm assurance needs. But NSA set a strong marker and took a bold step supported by all the producer and processor interests on the Red Tractor Beef and Lamb Board.

But it's no use complaining without coming up with solutions. NSA is busy surveying its regional committees on the principal needs that underpin sheep farming assurance.

I can't do this introduction without mentioning bluetongue virus (BTV) but, before I do, recognising that to date, more sheep farmers will have been

directly hit by Schmallenberg than BTV. I send a warning to all – as the year progresses the risk of BTV-3 is serious. If we get an incursion of infected midges and clinical signs anything like those seen in Holland there will be substantial costs, with animal and farmer welfare implications.

We have no BTV-3 vaccine and it could be late autumn or even 2025 before one becomes authorised adequately not to disrupt exports. The strategy, supported by NSA, is to do all we can to contain any outbreak and restrict movements to prevent further spread. This affects a number of farmers in order to protect others. But NSA will stress this to Defra and ministers and emphasise the need for continued support.

### Consequences

Unintended consequences of policy, and sometimes not very well communicated intended policies, are something I often talk about. We are seeing this now, with members reporting losing tenanted and rented land due to owners getting involved in attractive Landscape Recovery schemes, rewilding, carbon credits, biodiversity net gain, and of course tree planting on a large scale.

It's clear many smaller farms have maintained viability by taking on shorter term grassland tenures. Now many are losing this land and being squeezed back to business unviability, risking the breakdown of well-established systems and surrounding infrastructure.

It seems many regions of the UK are affected. NSA is working with a group of members in Cumbria where all are concerned about the breakdown of traditional fell farming and the risks for the Lake District's World Heritage Status, based in part on traditional pastoral and fell farming.

NSA is using this to profile that, when done well and in balance with good landscape and habitat management, sheep farming can provide one of the best multifunctional farming activities, producing quality food and fibre while also delivering a host of other public goods.

NSA Sheep 2024 is the place to hear more about real time developing topics. The more voices we have, the louder and wider our views can be heard.



National Sheep Association

The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH  
01684 892661 (Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)  
[www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk)  
[enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk)

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## NSA officeholders



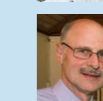
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Honorary President



**Peter Delbridge**  
Chair of the Board



**David Gregory**  
Honorary Treasurer &  
Finance Scrutiny Committee Chair



**Eddie Eastham**  
UK Policy & Technical Chair



**Kevin Harrison**  
English Committee Chair

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Contact via NSA Head Office or email directly

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## UK young shepherds show skills

Four young shepherds from each of the UK nations travelled to France at the end of May to take part in the World Young Shepherds competition.

Competing against others from Africa, Australia and beyond, Liam Doyle (Northern Ireland), Matthew Fearon (England), Caryl Davies (Wales) and Lana Bell (Scotland) showcased skills including shearing, ewe and lamb selection, electric fencing and more.

Congratulations to Matthew who came 5th and Liam who came 9th out of the 29 individual competitors. *Full report in the next edition of Sheep Farmer magazine.*



UK competitors demonstrated strong skillsets internationally.

## Official NSA AGM notice

Notice is hereby given that the 131st Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association will be held on Tuesday 13th August 2024 at 31 Ballygowan Road Kells, Ballymena, BT42 3PD, by kind permission of Roger and Hilary Bell.

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

- To approve the minutes of the 130th AGM.
- To receive and adopt the Trustees Report and Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2023.
- To elect officers for the ensuing year (President and Honorary Treasurer), Vice President(s) and auditors.

By order of the Board, members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form or to appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by 5pm on Friday 9th August 2024.

The AGM and subsequent farm walk on Roger and Hilary's Technology Demonstration Farm is open to all, but only NSA members can vote at the AGM. *More on the host farm on page 12.*

## NSA Scot Sheep huge success

As this edition arrives on your doormat the first summer NSA show is done and dusted.

NSA Scot Sheep held on Wednesday 5th June was a huge success, with visitors flocking from far and wide to experience a great day out. A jam-packed line-up of seminars, workshops, well respected speakers and breed society and trade stands as far as the eye could see, meant visitors went home satisfied but exhausted. Thanks to the hosts – the Hamilton family – for a tremendous effort pulling everything together. *Full report in the next magazine edition.*



The Hamilton family, NSA Scot Sheep hosts.

## NSA welcomes new faces

The NSA Head Office team has been pleased to welcome two new enthusiastic members of staff.

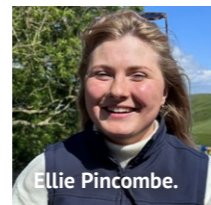
Joining in the new position of Assistant to the NSA Chief Executive is Andrea Calvesbert. Andrea brings excellent organisational skills to the role as well as a flourishing interest in the sheep sector and its policies.

Also welcomed into the office is Ellie Pincombe, NSA Digital Communications Officer. Ellie joins NSA at an exciting time for this position with promotion of NSA Sheep Event top of her varied jobs list.

Both have settled in like ducks to water and are working well as part of the Head Office team. *Contact details on page 1.*



Andrea Calvesbert



Ellie Pincombe.

## It's farm walk season!

Several NSA regions will be offering events in the coming months facilitating ample opportunity to observe progressive systems and catch up.

Joining is a great way to make the most of your membership. They also give you chance to meet with regional officeholders to discuss issues affecting you and your farm. *Upcoming events can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).*

## Schmallenberg online

Many members were hit by Schmallenberg over the lambing period.

NSA reminds all members of the regularly updated guidance and technical information available through AHDB and the Ruminant Health & Welfare Group websites, which NSA continues to play a role in developing. *More detail of the disease in the Feb/Mar edition of Sheep Farmer.*

## NSA Head Office update

In efforts to maximise the asset of the NSA Sheep Centre (the site where the association's office is located in Worcestershire), NSA is selling one of its buildings as part of negotiations to release restrictions placed across the whole site when it was purchased in the late 1980s. The sale of Firs Farmhouse will complete in June.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "The sale of this building will allow investment in the NSA offices and other buildings, and we have opened up greater freedom in how we can use our site in the future. It is an exciting time for NSA and it is confident this will help secure the association for the next phase of its history, and contribute to continuing improved services for our members."

## Upgrade and save

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

## A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.



New actions to be announced for England's SFI.

## New offers for English farming schemes

Over summer 50 new actions will be added to the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) offer including a closer integration of Countryside Stewardship Plus options.

A key development is non-basic payment scheme recipients will be eligible to apply even with little land. Tenant farmers are also eligible if they have management control of the land entered for the three year duration. Defra has committed to reviewing actions and prices on a rolling basis to allow a more flexible approach to external impacts and volatility.

New actions include enhanced offers for grassland, soil, heritage, engagement, moorland, wood pasture and habitat along with significant arable actions. In light of some instances where significant areas of land have been entered into non-productive scheme options having a negative impact on (mainly) arable production, Defra has introduced a new threshold where six non cropping related actions cannot exceed 25% of the farm area. A new carbon footprinting action is expected in late 2024 or early 2025. Regarding the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, the new endemic disease scheme is expected to be launched imminently, adding to the current review.

## Fairer food labelling consultation

A consultation to have labelling across products indicating production standards has been launched.

Apart from eggs, there is no mandatory requirement to provide information on the animal rearing process.

A range of industry-led voluntary labelling initiatives offer consumers information – such as farm assurance schemes, supermarket-specific commitments or standards and non-standardised marketing terms – but there is currently no clear, consistent way to differentiate between products based on animal welfare considerations, including those that meet or exceed UK baseline welfare regulations.

NSA is concerned how this will be applied to imported products so as not to unfairly disadvantage UK produce with some of the highest welfare standards in the world, how it might work within our sector given we don't have different systems that might be considered higher or lower welfare and guarding against well-meaning but unintentional consequences.



NSA is nervous about welfare labelling.

## Concerns over safe dip disposal rumble on

NSA, SCOPS and wider industry bodies have written to the Chief Veterinary Officers for all nations to highlight the significant issues facing spent dip disposal.

The cross-industry group highlighted there are only two treatment options for scab, plunge dipping and endectocides. But sheep scab mites have developed resistance to the endectocides and overreliance on these products also inadvertently increases worm resistance. This means dipping is increasingly essential for animal welfare.

Significant issues arise when sheep dip is disposed of inappropriately, having devastating impacts, particularly on aquatic life. Recently a key site for disposal of waste dip has stopped accepting waste, in turn highlighting only a handful of widely spread UK sites will accept waste sheep dip, and almost none at a realistic cost.

Without access to commercial disposal facilities, NSA is extremely concerned for environmental safety, animal welfare, and the sectors ability to control sheep scab.

## Dartmoor review and the uplands

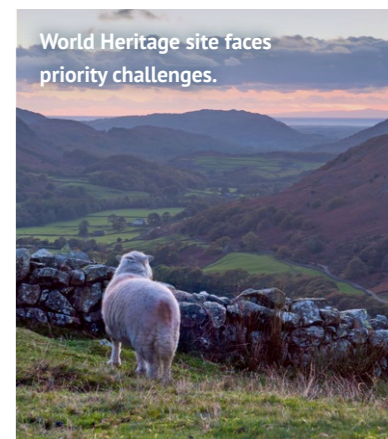
Following the Dartmoor Inquiry publication in December, Defra has submitted an overview of the intended actions, including the development of a Land-Use Management Group (LUMG).

LUMG will be responsible for developing a multi-functional land use framework and land use plan for Dartmoor.

Defra has significantly enhanced the moorland SFI offer to tackle fundamental issues outlined in the review, including payments for active shepherding, payments for grazing with cattle/ponies, appropriate stocking density payment and supplements for grazing with at-risk breeds.

NSA continues to actively support graziers and direct policymakers to ensure a sustainable outcome.

NSA is also supporting the significant concerns with the Lake District UNESCO World Heritage Site. A more detailed article on this will be shared in the next edition.



World Heritage site faces priority challenges.



Check out up and coming NSA events in your region.



Safe sheep dip disposal is becoming more difficult and costly.

## NSA Regions

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01691 654712 / 07976 803066  
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk**Eastern**Chair: **Robert Spink**Manager: **Nerys Wright**  
07891 187643  
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edward.adamson1@gmail.com**Scotland**Chair: **Peter Myles**Regional Coordinator: **Grace Reid**  
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southeast@nationalsheep.org.uk**South West**Chair: **Olly Matthews**Manager: **Ian May**  
07913 043234  
ian@nationalsheep.org.uk**NSA Ram Sales**Wales & Border: **Jane Smith**  
01291 673939  
jane@nsaramsales.co.ukSouth West: **Sue Martyn**  
01409 271385 / 07967 512660  
suem@nationalsheep.org.uk

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



## NSA regional reports

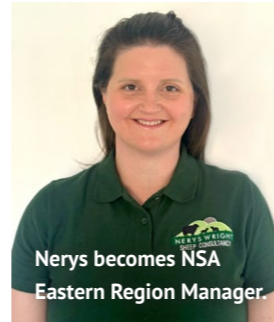
## NSA Eastern Region

By Katie James, NSA

**NSA Eastern Region is pleased to announce Nerys Wright, experienced sheep industry expert, has taken on the role as Regional Manager.**

Nerys joins NSA with a huge amount of knowledge in the sheep sector having grown up on a sheep and beef farm and working for several leading agricultural organisations. She's now an independent sheep consultant and comes into the role with a good understanding of NSA, previously an active member of both NSA Eastern and South East Regional Committees.

As *Sheep Farmer* arrives with members the Region will have just enjoyed a visit to Glovers Farm, Sedgeford, Norfolk, kindly hosted by David Cross. Thanks to David for this interesting visit. A full report can be found in the NSA Weekly Email Update.

**Nerys becomes NSA Eastern Region Manager**

## NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

**NSA Northern Ireland Region was pleased to welcome all to its marquee at the Balmoral Show.**

The area was a busy hive of activity with visitors interested to view this year's main NSA prize giveaway of a Nugent livestock trailer.

Looking further ahead the host of NSA Sheep Northern Ireland 2025 has now been confirmed. The McFarlane family from Dungiven, County Londonderry, farm sheep, suckler cows and run an online farm supplies shop. Their Benbradagh Flock of Blackface sheep has had considerable success and the whole family is very enthusiastic to hold next year's event.

The region is privileged to be holding the NSA AGM in August. We are indebted to hosts Roger and Hilary Bell, well known innovators and ambassadors for the province. [More on page 12.](#)

## NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

**Join us Thursday 27th June at 6pm at Glascoed, Aberhafesp, SY16 3HU, for an evening meeting discussing parasites.**

The farm is run by Alwyn Nutting and his family, managing 150 Welsh single-bearing ewes with a further 800 ewes, 40 cow suckler herd, finishing bull beef and heifers. In conjunction with Farming Connect, NSA will be joined by Elanco and independent sheep consultant Kate Philips.

The region now looks forward to welcoming members to our stand at the Royal Welsh Show. Rob Taylor, Wales's Rural & Wildlife Police Crime Coordinator, will be joining us to launch responsible dog ownership courses to prevent livestock attacks.

## NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

**NSA South West Region was pleased to support an industry livestock worrying awareness day in May.**

Thanks must go to Emily Gascoigne from Synergy Farm Health for her hard work in coordinating the event in collaboration with NSA, NFU, NFU Mutual, Dorset Police and Liverpool John Moores University. The event demonstrated the extent of sheep attacks by dogs nationally offering welcomed advice.

As we move into summer, I look forward to seeing you at the NSA South West Ram Sale on Wednesday 14th August. There are plans for a farm walk and pre-tupping event too.

**The Region welcomes members to its stand at the Royal Welsh Show.**

## NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

**Following another successful NSA Scot Sheep thanks go to hosts, the Hamilton family, for their hard work to make the event a triumph.**

A special mention goes to Euan Emslie, Event Organiser, Colin MacPhail, Event Chair, and to all the organising committee and volunteers for their exceptional efforts.

NSA Scottish Region now looks forward to seeing all members and the wider sheep industry at this year's Royal Highland Show in the NSA marquee on Avenue M, Stand 1(B).

## NSA South East Region

Sarah Blake, Manager

**NSA South East Region held its biennial Next Generation Shepherd competition in May.**

In conjunction with the Southern Shears competition at Copford Mill in East Sussex, a gloriously sunny day saw 10 entrants competing for a place in the finals at NSA Sheep Event. In recognition of the interest shown by these competitors the regional committee has offered all participants a year's free NSA membership.

Congratulations to Ellie Husk from Kent who gained first place and Rose Sidler, also from Kent who came second. Competition sponsors Rappa presented their own prize of an electric fence tester to Ellie Husk. Rose and Ruby Bristow will compete at the finals as Ellie is overseas.

**Ellie Husk was victor in NSA South East Region.**

## NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

**NSA Northern Region will have its usual presence at the Great Yorkshire Show and looks forward to seeing members there.**

A restaurant and bar will be available and patrons are reminded to enjoy it responsibly. The region is also planning further competitions and events for autumn. More details soon.

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**NSA Marches Region sponsored young handlers classes.**

## NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

**As *Sheep Farmer* arrives with you this month, NSA Marches Region will have just enjoyed supporting the Royal Three Counties Show, Worcestershire.**

The region was pleased to once again assist the shearing competitions and the young handlers classes, which demonstrated a great enthusiasm from the next generation for their stock and the sector's future.

We now look forward to joining members at the region's summer farm walk taking place on Wednesday 3rd July, kindly hosted by Tom Garlick and family on their farm in Orcop, Herefordshire. Further details are available on the NSA website or by calling Head Office.

## NSA Central Region

By Lizzy Wells, Manager

**NSA Central Region held its Next Generation Shepherd competition in May and what a brilliant day it was.**

Congratulations to James White, Staffordshire, who won the competition with Chloe Nadin, also from Staffordshire, closely behind. Both have qualified for the national final at the NSA Sheep Event. Thank you to Matt Haydon, NSA Central Region Vice Chair, and JCB farms for hosting and to the competition sponsors and regional volunteers.

**NSA Central Region congratulates James White.**

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The NSA stand will sit at the heart of NSA Sheep 2024 and be a hive of activity all day.

# NSA Sheep Event is focused on a sustainable sheep farming future

The final countdown is on for the return of the NSA Sheep Event, as NSA's flagship event takes place this July at its usual home of the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.

NSA Sheep 2024 will welcome visitors looking to enjoy the perfect day out for anyone involved in the UK sheep industry. The business-to-business event will feature its usual impressive array of seminars featuring top industry names, interactive workshops passing on useful practical shepherding advice, more than 250 trade and breed society stands, demonstrations, competitions and more!

For the first time in several years the event takes place during school summer holidays so will be adding additional attractions to keep everyone in the family entertained, no matter what their age.

Ant Spencer, Warwickshire sheep farmer and Event Committee Chair, comments: "There is no better show to demonstrate and celebrate all that is great about the UK sheep industry. It really is a great opportunity to have a day off the farm to get up to date with the latest news and innovations, and even better catch up with farming friends."



Sheepdogs are trialled ahead of the popular sale.

## Farm tours

Those wishing to make more of a visit to the event could sign up to join the pre-event farm tours taking place on Monday 29th July, in conjunction with Field Farm Tours. The tour will visit two different farming operations in the event's neighbouring county, Herefordshire.

Visitors can view a progressive enterprise working on regenerative principles with its flock of Romney cross ewes, a pedigree Hereford cattle herd and a mixed farming operation switching to wool shedding sheep that promotes efficient data recording for improved flock performance.

The evening before the event provides another occasion to gather with friends to celebrate at the NSA Sheep Event Industry dinner where, as well as enjoying a delicious three course meal, several notable names from industry will be recognised for their contribution to the UK sheep sector.

NSA members enter NSA Sheep Event for free on presentation of a current membership card. Tickets for non members are available to buy online meaning less time at the gate and more time on the showground enjoying the event. To make the most of the event with your family, under 16s can enter for free.

Visit [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk) for more information and to secure your early bird discounted tickets.

### MAJOR EVENT SPONSORS



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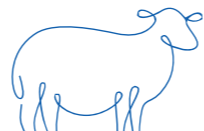
Tuesday 30th July 2024  
9:00AM – 5:00PM

NSA [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk)

## SHEEP EVENT

UK Sheep Farming: A positive future

THE THREE COUNTIES SHOWGROUND  
MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE, WR13 6NW



## Event highlights

**Cookery theatre** – Chefs will be on stage to inspire and cook up a feast of delicious lamb recipes.

**Strength, stamina and speed** – Watch some of the country's finest fencing contractors compete in the Tornado Wire Fencing competition.

**Buy the best** – Top sheepdogs will be on sale in the main ring with each lot put through its paces before bids are invited.

**Be in it to win it** – Visit the NSA stand for your chance to win our main 2024 prize of a Nugent livestock trailer or a prize from this year's event major sponsors.

**Family fun** – This year NSA will welcome the mini shepherds from your family to take part in fun trails, (toy) tractor driving, competitions and more.

**Industry partner demonstrations** – Experts from NSA partners AHDB, British Wool, Moredun and SCOPS will be ready to share the latest practical industry information.

**Live FECs** – Visit the SCOPS stand for real-time faecal egg counting and practical advice.



Get inspiration for dinner at the cookery theatre.

## Seminars promote debate and discussion

The NSA Sheep Event is renowned for attracting industry experts to speak in the popular seminar tent and 2024 will be no different.

Aiming to cover key, topical issues the seminars this year will discuss everything from business sustainability to our future diverse market opportunities.

A highlight of the seminar line up will be the launch of a new NSA Sustainability Report, produced in conjunction with Harper Adams University. The report provides a balanced, scientifically supported argument demonstrating the positive environmental, economical and social attributes sheep farming can deliver while also identifying areas where the sector can deliver more to improve future sustainability.



Workshops are an invaluable resource for picking up practical tips.

## Event workshops

- **The para'sight' – Putting theory into practice**  
Matthew Colston, Leah Speirs and Ben Strugnell, Elanco.
- **Lameness in sheep**  
Dr Katharine Baxter-Smith, MSD Animal Health.
- **A digital leap in sheep traceability**  
Valon Musa, Livestock Information.
- **Making the most of clovers and multispecies leys**  
Representatives from Germinal.
- **Thin ewes or just the tip of the iceberg?**  
Phillipa Page on behalf of Virbac.
- **Breed for CH4nge – what's it all about?**  
Dewi Jones and Dr Janet Roden, Innovis.
- **Farming reform update**  
Janet Hughes, Defra.
- **The Sheep Stratification Group – a proven system for a sustainable future**  
The Stratified Sheep Group.

Programme subject to change.

## Seminar timetable

**9.00am Seminar one: NSA Breakfast club – The future of Sheep Farming**

Join NSA for the first ever live NSA Breakfast Club providing visitors with the chance to question and hear firsthand from the main political parties on their visions for UK sheep farming.

Discussions will focus on where we are and where we see the sheep sector going with future farming schemes, policy changes and overcoming current and future challenges. This will be the first opportunity post the General Election to hear from those now leading UK agricultural policy.

**\*\*Pre-event seminar registration required\*\*** To fuel the discussion NSA, with kind support from Roythornes Solicitors invites members to register ahead to join this special seminar and receive a free breakfast bap. It's anticipated this seminar will draw a large crowd so secure your place by registering at [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk).  
**Chair:** Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive. **Speakers** from the main UK political parties.



Join in person or online.

**11.00am Seminar two: NSA report launch – Sheep: Planetary problem or sustainability saviour?**

The launch of NSA's brand-new policy report will be a great starting point for discussion on sector sustainability. Following scientific evidence on the importance of holistic sustainability, sheep farming contributions to the environment, the role of all parts of the stratified sheep system, and the value and strength of diversity in our sector will be up for debate with a top lineup of speakers from research and farming.

**Chair:** Peter Delbridge, NSA Chair. **Speakers:** Professor Jude Capper, Harper Adams University. Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive. John Yeomans, Powys sheep farmer.

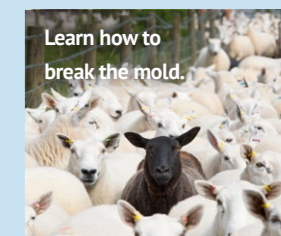


New report available from 30th July.

**1.00pm Seminar three: Managing business reform with positive solutions**

Seminar three will focus on managing and coping with business change when there is still uncertainty on the horizon. This session will discuss the need for taking positive steps forward into 2024 and beyond using real life examples of how you can approach change and make the most of future opportunities available.

**Chair:** Caryl Hughes, NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair. **Speakers:** Neil Adams, Promar. Liz Griffiths, Devon sheep farmer. Mark Suthern, Farming Community Network.



Learn how to break the mold.

**2:30pm Seminar four: Driving markets and trade opportunities**

Not to be missed is the final session of the day with well-known industry names discussing the future for trade affecting the UK sheep sector. Also hear how you can take your own steps to develop successful markets. Future opportunities to boost financial resilience and methods to overcome challenge will be discussed too.

**Chair:** Kevin Harrison, NSA Policy & Technical Committee Chair. **Speakers:** Awal Fuseini, AHDB. Jim Moseley, Red Tractor Assurance. Emyr Owen, Rhug Estate.



New ideas for resilience will be discussed.

# Competitors are ready to show off their skills

A popular feature of the event will once again be a series of competitions providing entertainment for visitors and allowing those attending to get involved to show off their skills and knowledge.

A returning favourite is the Tornado Wire Fencing competition. The contest is open to teams of professional fencing contractors and gives visitors the opportunity to see teams pit their skills against fellow competitors and demonstrate the advantage of good quality on-farm fence erection.

NSA will be joined by an expert grader from British Wool to judge fleeces brought along by producers on the event day, hoping to win prize money for the quality of their wool.



Do you have a fine fleece to enter at NSA Sheep 2024?

## New addition

An exciting new addition will join the competition line-up in 2024 as NSA and the wider industry looks to a sustainable sheep farming future. Sponsored by Kepak the competition will challenge the next generation of sheep farmers to put themselves in the scenario of taking on the management of a farm requiring modernisation to make it sustainable for the future. This new contest offers a generous prize pot of £700 as well as an invitation to NSA Sheep Event and NSA Sheep Event Industry Dinner for the three highest placed competitors.

And needing no introduction, the event will play host to the exciting finals of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd national final, sponsored by the Texel Sheep Society. Having qualified from regional heats across the UK, 18 skilled young sheep farmers will compete in a series of common shepherding tasks, demonstrating why the future of the UK sheep sector is in safe hands. Successful competitors will take home a slice of the impressive £2,000 prize pot.

Young sheep farmers will also be able to enter the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs team shearing competition, sponsored by Lister Shearing Equipment, through their local YFC.

## Chance to win

Other competitions running on the day will include a chance to win prizes from the event's major sponsors in a lucky 'sheep dip', plus special competitions will run especially for children attending the event, encouraging them to get involved and enjoy the fun – more good reasons to enjoy NSA Sheep 2024 this summer.

Find out more about all the exciting competitions and enter today at [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk).



Skilled young shepherds will compete at the event.

## Shepherding finalists

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Competing for your region in the NSA Next Generation Shepherds final are: | <b>NSA Central Region</b>    |
|   | • James White                |
|   | • Chloe Nadin                |
| <b>NSA Cymru/Wales Region</b>   | <b>NSA Eastern Region</b>    |
| • Menna Protheroe   | • Jack Fletcher              |
| • Gethin Rhys Roberts   | • Tilly Abbott               |
| <b>NSA Northern Ireland Region</b>  | <b>NSA South West Region</b> |
| • Alexander Boyd  | • Will Land                  |
| • Liam Doyle  | • Luke Parkhouse             |
| <b>NSA Marches Region</b>   | <b>NSA South East Region</b> |
| • Ben Edwards   | • Rose Sidders               |
| • Thomas Garlick  | • Ruby Bristow               |
| <b>NSA Northern Region</b>  | <b>NSA Scottish Region</b>   |
| • Thomas Watson   | • Ian Armstrong              |
| • Matthew Fearon  | • Harry Gemmill              |

## SHEEP EVENT

UK Sheep Farming: A positive future

**Tuesday 30th July 2024**

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- PRE EVENT FARM TOUR
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- SHEEP BREED SOCIETIES
- NEXT GENERATION SHEPHERD OF THE YEAR COMPETITION
- TORNADO FENCING COMPETITION AND OTHER COMPETITIONS
- TECHNICAL & POLICY INFORMATION
- ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
- TRADE STANDS & WORKSHOPS DEMONSTRATIONS
- SHEEP DOG SALE

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# Data driven farm opens its gates for the NSA AGM this August

By Katie James, NSA

Visitors to this years NSA AGM on Tuesday 13th August will not only hear a roundup of NSA activity but enjoy an insightful visit to hosts Roger and Hilary Bell's 500 Texel cross Mule ewe enterprise.

Situated near Kells, Ballymena, Northern Ireland, Roger and Hilary's 160 acre (65ha) farm is known for its efficient grassland management and is one of Northern Ireland's network of Technology Demonstration Farms, regularly opening its farm gates to allow others to see new technology and innovations in place, encouraging widespread adoption on their own farms.

## Efficiency

At the heart of the business is a drive to increase and improve efficiency to maximise liveweight produced per hectare from both the sheep and beef enterprises. Best management is practiced in all areas using data collection

technologies to help achieve this. Roger and Hilary's enthusiasm to implement new technologies suitable to their business instigated a previous nomination for the Farmers Weekly Farm Innovator award.

Roger comments: "Data informs every decision made on the farm with data collection beginning at tupping time with the use of EID technology to group ewes and assign a ram to that batch.

"At lambing, lambs are tagged at birth and a record is made of weight, sex and date. Maternal characteristics of the dam are also recorded such as lambing ease, mothering ability and milk supply. This information is subsequently used to make informed management decisions around the selection of replacements."

## Grassland

Grassland management is critical. Grass growth is measured and recorded weekly using a plate meter. Roger adds: "The farm itself is challenging to manage as the land is made up predominantly of heavy soil and in parts runs to 790ft (240m) above sea level. Measures put in place to optimise grass production include soil sampling on a yearly basis allowing soil needs to be met appropriately."

A robust health plan is also in place. "Ewes are blood tested at least once a year to provide a metabolic profile, which allows any deficiencies to be addressed. Lambs are dosed according to faecal egg count results taken before and after



treatment to monitor resistance levels. For us, liver fluke is the main parasite issue on farm and therefore a rigorous programme for fluke treatment is in place," Roger highlights.

Lambs are weighed regularly throughout the season to ensure they meet optimum market specification as they go direct to slaughter helping the couple maximise liveweight produced per hectre.

Everyone at NSA is excited to join Roger and Hilary in welcoming visitors to the AGM in August.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "We are very much looking forward to visiting Roger and Hilary for an insightful event. The farm is a fantastic example of how data can be crucial to move farm businesses forward. We do hope members in Northern Ireland as well as those from mainland Britain can join us. The farm is conveniently located for Belfast airports so why not enjoy a daytrip to come and view this excellent system."

*NSA AGM details on page 2.*



Hilary and Roger Bell.

## How well is your wormer working? Test, don't guess!

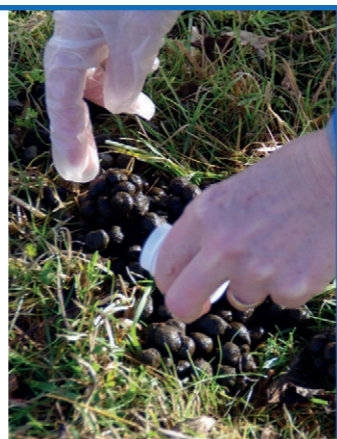


Resistance to wormers is increasing across sheep farms in the UK.

- Don't wait until you can see the wormer hasn't worked and lamb growth rates have suffered.
- A simple test using a faecal egg count before and after\* drenching will give you early warning that worms are surviving treatment.
- In England, funding is available for a Worming Treatment Check via the Defra Animal Health & Welfare Pathway.
- Ask your vet or adviser for support or visit the SCOPS website.

*\* interval varies according to the product used.*

Visit [www.scops.org.uk/treatmentcheck](http://www.scops.org.uk/treatmentcheck)



Find out more about FECs on the SCOPS stand (Avon Hall) at the NSA Sheep Event on Tuesday 30th July 2024

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# The important role of NSA regional committees and the faces behind them

By Katie James, NSA

As highlighted in the last edition of *Sheep Farmer*, NSA's regional network is the foundation of the organisation, offering members the opportunity to engage with like-minded folk at regional meetings and attend the varied enjoyable events.

As a grassroots organisation, its regional committee meetings provide the basis of NSA's work, where issues of concern can be highlighted to officeholders for discussion and actioned in other parts of the NSA network. In this edition we delve into the NSA Cymru/Wales Region.

## NSA in Wales

The regional committee of NSA Cymru/Wales Region is an important group of farmers and allied industry representatives who make a valuable contribution to NSA's work in Wales. As the region has the greatest number of NSA members, the committee is a large and lively group of representatives meeting regularly to discuss the future of the Welsh sheep sector including its engagement with the Welsh Government and other influential groups to provide a strong voice for sheep farmers across the nation.

The region hosts the popular NSA Welsh Sheep every other year, moving to a different location in Wales each time with free entry for NSA members.

Helen Roberts, NSA Cymru/Wales Development Officer, says: "The region is diverse so tries to involve all parts of the sheep industry on its committee. It has good connections with government and hosts farm walks, open committee meetings and of course NSA Welsh Sheep running biannually. New members are always welcome especially those with an interest in joining the regional committee."

Contact your region using the details on pages 4/5.

## Caryl Hughes NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair



Caryl is excited to be Regional Chair.

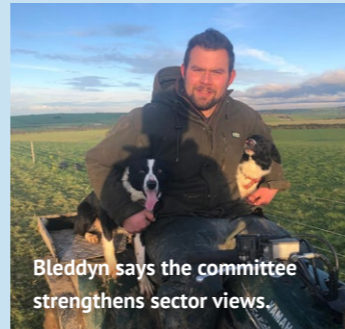
When I became an NSA Next Generation Ambassador I was interested to learn more about what being an NSA member entailed. I attended regional meetings as often as I could and got involved with the NSA Welsh Sheep event in Brecon. I'm fortunate to live near to Helen Roberts so it was easy for me to get involved.

I'm looking forward to getting immersed in NSA and taking up all the opportunities it offers members. Being Chair of the Region is an honour and I aim to champion and promote the prospects young people have in the industry, hopefully attracting future young members to the organisation.

## Fact file

- NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2017.
- Become Regional Chair this year.

## Bleddyn Davies Committee member



Bleddyn says the committee strengthens sector views.

Being part of the regional committee has given me an insight into the amount of work NSA does behind the scenes benefiting everyone within the sector. The amount of knowledge and experience within the committee along with the numerous characters who attend ensure there is no such thing as a quiet meeting, and everyone leaves with plenty of food for thought.

I would encourage any young sheep farmers or those looking to enter the industry to apply for the NSA Next Generation programme – the experience, knowledge and friendships made during the programme are priceless – and then to carry on the relationship with NSA by joining a regional committee.

## Fact file

- NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2018.
- Joined the regional committee after his Ambassador stint.

## Rhodri Owen Committee member



Rhodri works at Coleg Glynllifon.

I have been an NSA member representing Coleg Glynllifon in North Wales for many years. I am passionate for the industry and how it develops towards a sustainable future. NSA has inspired the college to innovate and build sustainability into our sheep production system.

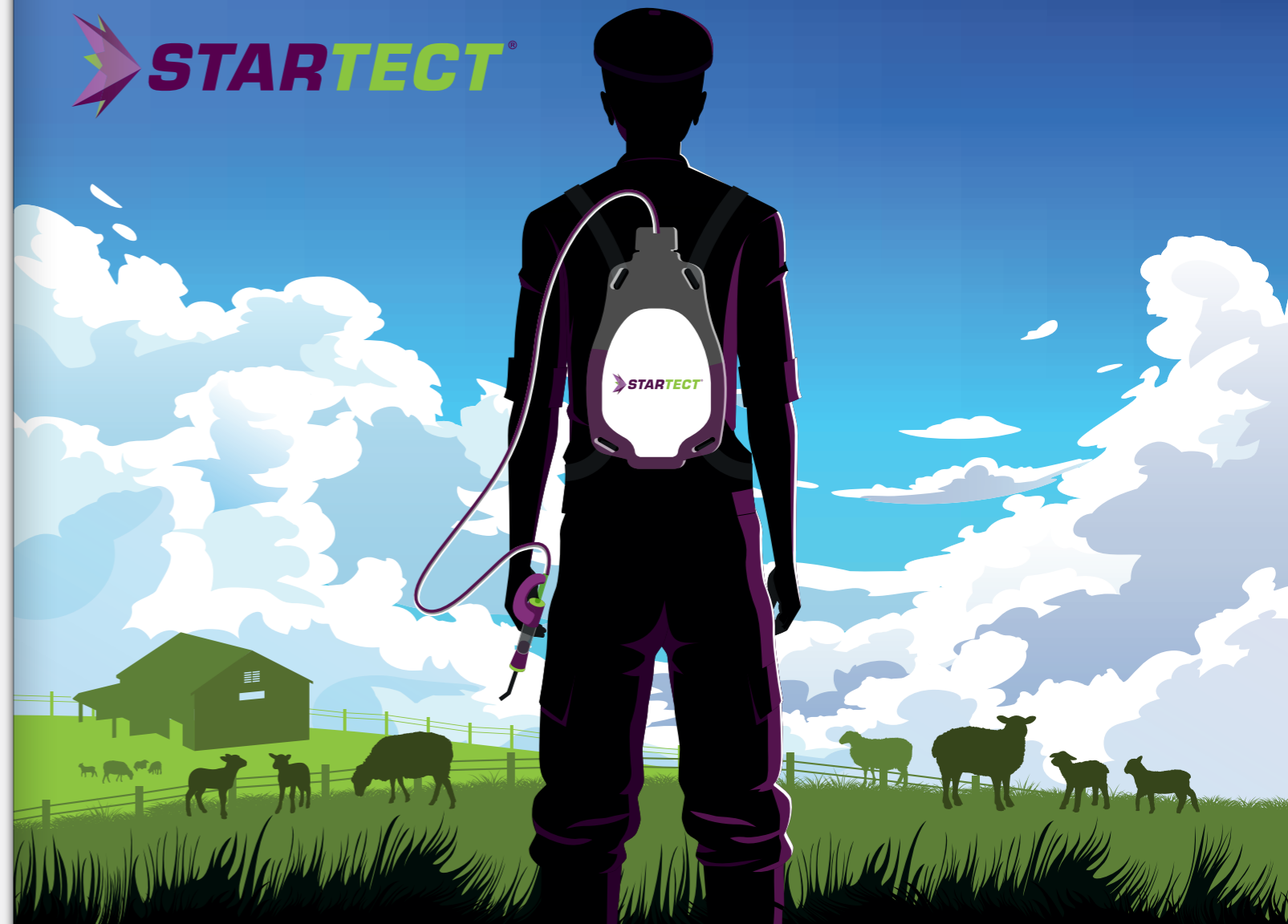
As a committee member I get to experience and contribute to the Welsh voice on industry matters and ensure our young shepherds are well represented on policy and production issues.

The industry faces new challenges as we move forward and has constantly evolved over the years, which is nothing new to us, as shepherds are resilient and passionate. In Wales we are the custodians of our Welsh culture and language in rural areas, our production systems are resilient, innovative and sustainable, and NSA represents us on all policy and research decisions.

## Fact file

- Farm, Forest and Innovation Manager at Coleg Glynllifon.
- Has trained students for the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition for more than 20 years.

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References: 1. Leathwick DM., Veterinary Parasitology 2012; 186: 93-100. 2. Little PR, et al., Veterinary Parasitology 2011; 181: 180-93. 3. Miller, CM, et al., Vet Parasitol, 2012. STARTECT® Dual Active Oral Solution for sheep contains 10mg/ml derquantel and 1 mg/ml abamectin. POM-VPS. For further information please see the product's SPC or contact Zoetis UK Ltd, First Floor, Birchwood Building, Springfield Dr, Leatherhead, KT22 7LP • www.zoetis.co.uk • Customer Support: 0345 300 8034 or customersupportUK@zoetis.com Use medicines responsibly (www.noah.co.uk/responsible). Date of preparation: October 2023. MM-27649



# NSA warns we are not out of the woods when it comes to bluetongue

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

Bluetongue (BTV) hit many sheep farmers in the country throughout the later part of last year and into the spring in varying degrees of severity.

By March this year, there had been a total of 126 confirmed cases of BTV-3 across 73 locations in England in regions of Kent, Norfolk, Suffolk and Surrey. These cases were predominately in cattle (119 cases) with fewer in sheep (seven cases). All positive cases found across England were detected through proactive surveillance.

NSA is involved at a ministerial level and within the Defra Core Group, looking at the risk of further bluetongue outbreaks as the weather conditions warm and become more conducive to midge activity. The group is also considering options for movement controls and how they would impact on disease spread, exploring strategies for vaccines and coordinating communication efforts.

## Risks

As we come to the end of the low vector period midge activity has increased rapidly. The Animal & Plant Health Agency has confirmed there is now a very high probability of bluetongue being introduced to livestock in Britain through infected biting midges being blown over to the UK from Northern Europe.

Experience in Holland and neighbouring countries has shown severity of disease varies among different species, with clinical signs being most severe in sheep, resulting in death, weight loss and disruption in wool growth. In highly

susceptible sheep, morbidity can be as high as 100%. Mortality averages are 2-30% but can be as high as 70%, therefore complacency isn't an option. So how can you prepare for the rising risks?

1. Buyer beware. If you have to source animals from the continent do so responsibly and demand pre-movement testing.
2. Take action, prioritise biosecurity and report any suspicious clinical signs.
3. Monitor your livestock closely, as vigilance is key.

There is currently no licenced vaccine available in Britain for BTV-3 and there is no cross protection between strains. For example, a vaccine for BTV-4 will not protect an animal against BTV-3 or any other strain. A BTV-3 vaccine has been produced by Syva in Spain, with the Netherlands and Belgium issuing emergency use authorisations in advance of full authorisation.

This may sound appealing to farmers in Britain, but vaccine use under emergency authorisation can result in the loss of meat export access to the EU and this could have highly damaging impacts for our markets and ultimately sheep welfare in itself. It is hoped the high uptake of this vaccine in Holland and Belgium may reduce the risk of infection spreading to the UK and this is being closely watched by the Veterinary Medicines Directive with the preference being full authorisation in due course.

## Midge activity

When it comes to disease transmission, it is important to remember the insect is key. Midges



Midges carry the virus and infect livestock upon biting.

## Act on BTV

1. Awareness of how BTV-3 is transmitted as a vector-borne disease.
2. Caution against any misinformation, but instead view the latest facts.
3. Tactics on-farm to help with midge control must be evidence-based.

are infected with bluetongue virus after ingesting blood from infected animals. Apart from a risk of spread through infected needles during routine vaccinations, without the midge, the disease cannot spread from animal to animal.

Bluetongue virus is not transmitted through contact with animals, wool or consumption of milk and therefore there is no public health risk associated with bluetongue, nor is there a risk of transmission just through animal-to-animal contact. When considering semen and foetuses this becomes slightly more complicated.

The nature of BTV-3 means currently we don't know where or when an outbreak is likely. It is therefore vital farmers across the entire country remain extremely vigilant. Advice is to 'act' on BTV-3, be aware of how bluetongue is transmitted as a midge-borne disease, take caution against misinformation, and promote evidence-based tactics on-farm (see panel above).

NSA is continuing to work alongside other industry stakeholders to assess the implications of a wider BTV-3 spread during spring and summer and is encouraging all members across the country to stay up to date with advice. AHDB and the Ruminant Health & Welfare Group have an extensive library of online webinars and technical advice, production of which has been supported by NSA.



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# Where things stand with farm assurance – an update from the ground

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

In October 2023 Red Tractor announced the launch of the Greener Farms Commitment module to a frosty industry reception.

The lack of prior discussion meant industry was somewhat blindsided by an additional (although optional) module going above and beyond regulation and the Future Farming Schemes.

Since then, NSA supported the review of both Red Tractor governance but also a fundamental review of the role of assurance in the beef and lamb sector and the wider markets it serves.

Fast forward to now and the review of Red Tractor governance is complete, plus an industry-wide review of farm to fork assurance being officially launched, jointly commissioned by National Farmers Union and AHDB, along with NFU Cymru, Ulster Farmers Union and NFU Scotland. These organisations will form part of the assurance review steering group. NSA, through the NSA English Committee, is in the process of outlining a framework of needs and acceptability.

## UK-wide review

The review is set to examine:

- How farm assurance can deliver value back to scheme members.
- How standards are developed to meet the evolving needs of members, the markets they serve, sector diversity and in appreciation of the global marketplace.
- How assurance members are engaged with (including the development of standards), inspected and how technology is used in assurance now and in future.
- How assurance schemes can and should fit with regulation and government schemes to best serve members.

It is felt by many across the sheep industry a significant shift is needed to achieve a more fluid approach to assurance, and that current levels of bureaucracy do not deliver the key pillars of a successful scheme. NSA continues to support the principle of farm assurance and commends the success of FAWL, QMS and NIBL but these devolved nation schemes have managed a significant difference in approach while achieving desired outcomes.

Red Tractor Assurance should adopt a bold new approach to assurance needs and with this in mind, after very serious consideration, NSA wrote

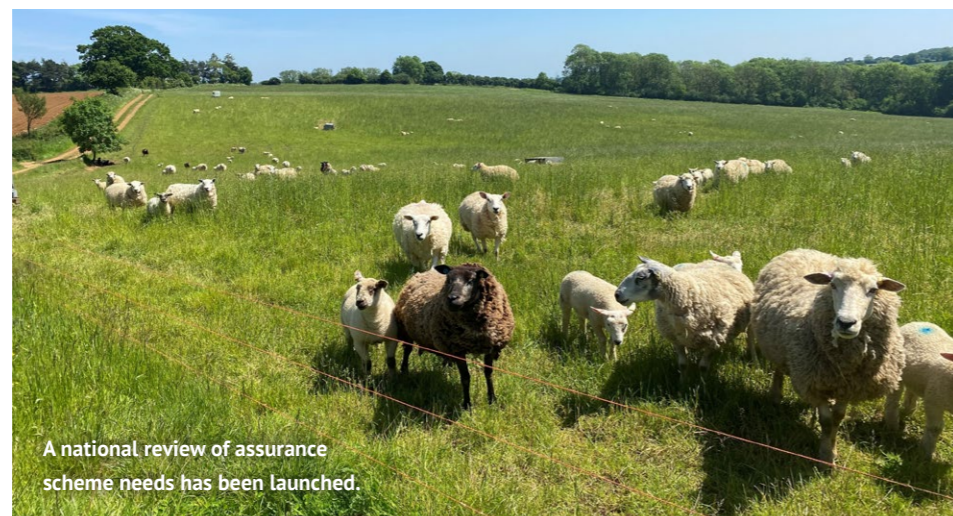
to the Red Tractor ownership bodies and Chair, Christine Tacon, in May to say it had no confidence the current leadership team had the ability or interest in making the changes necessary. NSA said, to maintain Red Tractors relevance and success, a fresh approach in leadership was required.

## Statement

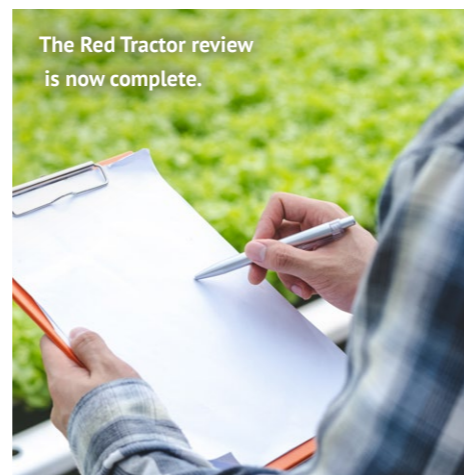
Working with the support of NSA English Committee, NSA prepared a letter to be delivered by Red Tractor Assurance Beef & Lamb Board member Bryan Griffiths. This was followed by a verbal statement proposing no confidence in the senior Red Tractor management team to preside over the changes needed and identified in the Red Tractor governance review.

NSA expects farm assurance should result in earned recognition and appreciates some of the standards may already result in a reduced frequency of inspection from government agencies. But Red Tractor standards should recognise involvement in other schemes – such as the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, or the Sustainable Farming Incentive – as giving earned recognition to Red Tractor, with equivalence being aimed for. Every effort should also be made to ensure any additional standards are not gold-plating legislation, through numerous specific audit points leading to a multitude of written statements and reports.

While farm assurance logos have a role in retail marketing NSA opposes the development of Red Tractor as a brand. It is up to brand holders and retailers to develop their own brands based on consumer and market interests, using Red Tractor as a 'kite mark' to underpin food safety and traceability as well as core animal welfare and legal requirements.



A national review of assurance scheme needs has been launched.



The Red Tractor review is now complete.

Where retailers want a point of difference this could be integrated into the farm assurance inspection but clearly as a bolt-on, which producers are rewarded for, and not as part of the foundation scheme.

## Alternative

There are alternative assurance schemes – for example higher welfare, environmental or PGI labelling – providing more niche options for farmers and retailers who wish to go above and beyond this foundation level, and those who opt for these should be paid accordingly. These schemes should complement each other offering services for the industry rather than competing against each other.

NSA is committed to the principle of farm assurance and would like to see as few barriers as possible for sheep keepers to sign up and remain scheme members. It is imperative farm assurance delivers for the sheep sector.

[NSA welcomes member views submitted via policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.](mailto:policy@nationalsheep.org.uk)

# 90% of lameness in most sheep farms caused by Foot Rot and Scald

Advertorial

## Lameness in Sheep

Lameness is one of the biggest problems in sheep farming and the condition causes considerable morbidity by impacting significantly on productivity and economic returns. It is also a major animal welfare issue. In the UK, the farmer-estimated prevalence of lameness over a period of ten years in English flocks was an average of 8.4% and was similar a decade later at 10%. Foot rot and scald account for 90% of lameness in most sheep farms.

## Hoof Care and Footbaths

As with most conditions, "prevention is better than cure" and regular foot baths with a safe and effective compound is a sound financial investment. Footbaths have been used as routine prophylactics for lameness for many years and most have centred around copper, zinc, or formalin type ingredients. Some new alternatives for hoof care are now available which based on clinical field trials hold up very well when compared to copper or formalin. In addition, these newer compounds are safer to the handler and less toxic to the environment. Formalin for instance is known to be carcinogenic, toxic, and irritant, and copper is environmentally toxic and can be toxic to sheep.

## New Alternative

A new alternative to these traditional types of footbaths is Tea Tree oil (TTO), an essential oil which has been shown to have many beneficial medicinal uses as an antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, antifungal, and antibacterial agent, where it is used routinely in skin and epidermal care. TTO has been proven to have potent antibacterial and anti-inflammatory actions and also promotes health in the hoof keratin.

Hoofsure Endurance from Provita is a proven and safe footbath solution, a proprietary blend of organic acids, tea tree oil, and wetting agents. It has been highly successful in the field in both sheep and cattle, in preventing lameness and thereby avoiding the heavy financial costs arising from the subsequent appearance of lameness.

## Comparative trials

Comparative field trials were performed using Hoofsure Endurance against copper sulfate and formalin footbaths, albeit primarily on cattle lesions but the data is very much transferrable to sheep because the infection cycle is very similar. Notable research shows that Hoofsure Endurance is up to 44% more effective than formalin and copper sulfate with proven antibacterial activity.

Queens University Belfast performed a time kill study on Hoofsure Endurance to determine its inherent antibacterial nature compared to formalin and copper sulfate. Under clean test conditions within 5 minutes, copper sulfate and formaldehyde were 99.99% and 99.9999% less effective than Hoofsure Endurance. Under dirty conditions within 5 minutes, the efficacy of copper sulfate and formaldehyde were reduced even further while the efficacy of Hoofsure Endurance was unaffected by the presence of dirt. The dirty conditions were designed to replicate a typical on-farm challenge for footbath preparations. Hoofsure Endurance exceeded the efficacy test requirements under all test conditions whilst copper sulfate and formaldehyde failed to meet the test criteria.

This laboratory data was backed by a recent independent study on the effectiveness of footbath solutions in sheep found that 65% of sheep improved after one pass through a footbath containing Hoofsure Endurance at 2% dilution rate.

References available on request. Written by Dr TB Barragry PhD MScMVB MRCVS (Vet Pharmacologist). For more information please contact Provita Animal Health on 0800 328 4982 or [info@provita.co.uk](mailto:info@provita.co.uk)

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## International visits highlight shared challenges and reintroduction concerns

In April Peter Myles, NSA Scottish Region Chair, spent a few days in Cordoba, Spain as one of several guest speakers addressing a national congress on the future of extensive livestock farming.

Several issues discussed were comparable to UK farmer experiences. Not only do Spanish farmers have an overly bureaucratic and unwieldy CAP



Grace heard from international farmers tackling lynx reintroductions.

policy and issues with health and welfare but also a shortage of local abattoirs.

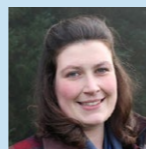
There are similar pressures from the green lobby and an anti-meat agenda, with restrictions on the number of days sheep are allowed to graze beneath olive trees and a lack of appreciation of the contribution grazing livestock make in preventing wildfires.

### Lynx

Representing NSA I was one of 15 Scottish agricultural industry delegates invited to Switzerland to investigate how Swiss farmers deal with apex predation by lynx and how regenerative forestry can be utilised. Despite relatively low numbers of sheep predation compared to other continental nations, Switzerland continues to experience lynx conflict, albeit in much smaller numbers than the wolf, which is an even bigger looming and complex threat.

Initial reintroductions of lynx took place in the early 1970s with the peak of sheep predation being experienced in the 1990s. In 2001 a management plan was introduced

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



after a steep learning curve to enable coexistence with the apex predator. The management plan still exists and delivers for farmers in terms of conservation, damage prevention, compensation for damage and interventions/regulations. Robust financial compensation alongside support for implementing mitigation measures and a whole suite of options related to farming exist.

A real-world example of reintroduction shortcoming exists in the form of the white-tailed sea eagle and its management in Scotland. It is clear there are huge cultural differences not only between landscape use and public perception of the agricultural industry but also in terms of governmental relationship and budget.

Rest assured NSA continues to engage robustly and fully on the threat of lynx reintroduction in Scotland and other locations throughout the UK. Particular attention is being paid to two projects currently looking in the Cairngorms, Scotland, and Kielder Forest, Northumberland, for lynx reintroductions with further activities planned this year and beyond.

## Yet more uncertainty ahead for Welsh agricultural policy

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Last time I wrote there was change at the top with Huw Irranca Davis stepping in as the new Climate and Rural Affairs lead in Wales.

Now following a lengthy and tense consultation process, the introduction of the Sustainable Farming Scheme has thankfully been delayed.

The announcement came at a pivotal time in policy development. Welsh agriculture needs a future farming scheme fit for purpose and to deliver for food production, the environment and businesses. In its current form it's no secret the scheme achieves very little of this.

### Consultation

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has been clear throughout the process that although some aspects of the scheme could work successfully the fundamental principles were not achievable

nor was there any cohesive approach to design or piloting.

Meanwhile, NSA Cymru/Wales Region is supporting the Gwaredu scab project running again from September – with slight changes.



Welsh agricultural policy continues to cause headaches.

New farms, particularly those with common grazing, will be prioritised over the 525 farms that have already benefited. Set-up, dipping up to 1,000

sheep and all dip disposal will be funded, as long as participants cover the cost of any additional sheep, undertake online learning and attend farmer meetings.

### Reintroductions

Based on its knowledge of similar projects in Scotland and South East England, NSA is carefully watching proposals by Gent and Durrell Wildlife Trusts to introduce a small white-tailed sea eagle population to South East Wales and the Severn Estuary.

Feasibility work is being conducted, followed by further assessments with a focus on ecological and social-economic infrastructure. Early dialogue has taken place offering knowledge transfer and to understand levels of support and/or concerns, which NSA Cymru/Wales Region will continue to engage with.

Call 01554 748576 before 1st September to register interest in the Gwaredu scab project.

## Climate change actions will impact NI farmers on multiple levels

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



On-farm medicine and antimicrobial usage is going to need careful monitoring in the future and comes under the auspices of the Animal Health and Welfare Group Northern Ireland.

NSA Northern Ireland Region sits on the group focusing on medicine uses and has a keen interest in the tools veterinary surgeons and farmers can use to record their usage. We still need to be mindful of legacy Brexit barriers on the importation of antibiotics and vaccines for veterinary use from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

At present there is a derogation allowing this trade to continue but it comes to an end next year and this needs to be addressed before it's too late.

The Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance Scheme has been selected by Daera to run on-farm carbon audits as part of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022. This will involve some serious planning and NSA NI Region will have a representative in the process.



Carbon audits become a reality for NI farmers.

The impact of other climate change targets is also beginning to be felt, such as Marks & Spencer challenging 8,500 farmer-suppliers in Northern Ireland to use developing technologies to reduce the carbon footprints of their operations.

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**chanelle PHARMA**

The Scottish Ag Bill is still going through parliament.



# Ministerial change in Scotland as agricultural policy discussion continues

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

NSA Scottish Region has again highlighted concerns over the level of confidence in Scottish Government from the agricultural sector, particularly with the resignation of the First Minister.

The end of April saw yet more turmoil in Scottish political leadership with the resignation of First Minister Humza Yousaf following two votes of no confidence. The First Minister's decision to end the Bute House Agreement – the power sharing deal with the Scottish Greens – followed a backlash over the Scottish National Party scrapping 2030 climate targets among other things, resulted in his resignation. We now have John Swinney sworn in as the seventh First Minister, taking office 25 years after he was first elected to the Scottish Parliament.

## Targets

A critical report published in March by the independent Climate Change Committee said Scotland was so far behind what was needed to meet the 2030 target it was no longer credible. But Mr Swinney has outlined his commitment and ambition to make real measurable progress towards 2045 climate targets still in place.

The extent of change at the top has again slowed the process of developing new agricultural schemes in Scotland following the EU referendum in 2016, leaving farming businesses in yet more uncertain territory. NSA waits to see if there remains any continuity in terms of developments under the new First Minister, which may impact the Scottish agricultural industry.

The long awaiting Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill is currently

undergoing amendments with a final publication awaited. This will lay the groundwork for powers to develop a new agricultural support system delivering for food, farming and the environment. Scottish ministers have proposed a new four-tier payment system to replace the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), announcing at least half of all funding for farming and crofting will be targeted towards outcomes for biodiversity gain and climate mitigation and adaption.



Future funding will be focused on environmental and emissions targets.

Scottish agriculture currently adheres to CAP and many farmers are still claiming via the Basic Payment Scheme, but in 2021 the Cabinet Secretaries announced a National Test Programme was to be developed with farmers and crofters to further their understanding of how farming and food production can be even more economically and environmentally sustainable. This was one of the first moves made by Scottish Government to start a process to move away from CAP, a process well advanced in England and less advanced in the other devolved nations.

Preparing for Sustainable Farming – the first part of this programme – came into play in spring 2022. It's laying the foundations to ensure

the new rural support regime introduced will integrate enhanced conditionality of at least half of all funding for farming by 2025. As part of this conditionality, recipients of support must deliver on targeted outcomes for biodiversity gain and low emissions production.

Conditionality means climate mitigation and biodiversity actions will be required to receive agricultural support payments in the future. Currently there are three funded options including carbon audits, soil sampling and analysis, and animal health and welfare interventions.

## Ag bill

The form of the new agriculture bill (currently in its third phase of amendments) has garnered conflicting opinions with many viewing the tiered system as rewarding those already reaping the rewards of CAP but providing little environmental benefits or public goods.

NSA has worked across all nations in developing new agricultural schemes and recognises the difficulties in getting to a position where a scheme can truly deliver for farming. But the bill offers an opportunity for Scottish Government to deliver for a sector providing a raft of public goods, an enhanced environment and producing world leading produce – it must not just be a reiteration of CAP, which failed so many, in a bid to be relatable to the EU.

It was made clear previous lacklustre responses from ministers cannot and will not be tolerated. As the Scottish Agricultural Bill makes its way through parliament, NSA will continue to ensure Scottish farmers and their produce are represented and are at the forefront of future decisions to ultimately be a food secure nation while supporting their endeavours to deliver.



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# NSA Next Generation Ambassadors continue with programme



The 2024 cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors came together for the second time in May.

Spending three days together in Darlington, County Durham, the group covered topics such as grassland management, business benchmarking and sustainable parasite control, as well as valuable advice passed on by industry experts Liz Genever, Nerys Wright and the AHDB team of Emily Symonds and Julie Clark.

The group also enjoyed insightful visits to local farmers Clare and Stewart Wise at Bishopton, viewing the enterprise's health focused flock, and a visit to Richard Brown at Stockton-on-Tees,

where grassland management and herbal leys were the hot topic.

## Understanding

Katie James, NSA Communications Manager, joined the group and comments: "The group continues to demonstrate an impressive level of understanding of practical shepherding and the UK sheep sector, while at the same time clearly showing enthusiasm to learn more and develop their careers and businesses.

"Thank you to all who contributed to this session. The Ambassadors really did hear from some of the very best in the industry." The group will come together again ahead of the NSA Sheep Event in July.



Session two for the ambassadors focused on grassland management.

## Ambassador updates

We will be catching up with the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors throughout the year. Here, three of this year's group update us on recent activity from their farms.

### Ailish Ross Warwickshire

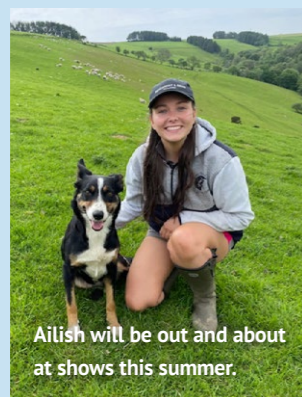
I sit writing this blog update in Birmingham airport, waiting for a flight for the first show of the season for me – Balmoral – reflecting on the past few months.

The year seems to be flying by and has been rather hectic, travelling between Warwickshire and my partner's farm in South Wales, with the small task of lambing in between!

I was lucky enough to get the best of both worlds this year and work my nine to five from home, which allowed me to get involved with lambing. The team at Cwm Risca lamb 1,100 Lleyn cross ewes, mostly outside, a new system for me to get used to. I thoroughly enjoyed it and learnt lots of new things on the way.

As with all other farmers this spring the weather was not our friend. The constant rainfall made conditions very challenging. But, now with a couple of weeks of sunny showers and warm days the lambs are looking well out on the valley.

With the summer show season upon us, I am out of the office at shows, events or sales almost every week until September. Come and say hello if you see me out and about!



Ailish will be out and about at shows this summer.

### George Fussey Lincolnshire

With a tough lambing period coming to a close in mid-April, attention turned to spring drilling and grazing management.

Having had a cold, wet winter, we were ready for some warmer weather. With all the ewes and lambs out on temporary grass and herbal leys we were able to start implementing our rotational grazing system. The ewes and lambs go onto this system after we have taken the four-week lamb weights. Purchasing a new digital plate meter has increased accuracy and sped up monitoring.

The mobs are on a 21-day rotation with a move every three days. Our aim is to get the sheep onto the paddock at 3,000kgDM/ha and then remove them at 1,500kgDM/ha. But, in the last couple of weeks we have seen grass growth skyrocket, and we are 250kgDM/ha over our targets. You all know what that means... more sheep required!

We are currently in the middle of sowing down new herbal leys in the arable rotation as part of the SFI scheme. We have also been keeping a close eye on egg counts.



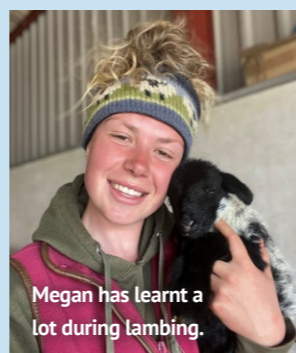
George feels he needs more sheep to cope with grass availability.

### Megan Price Hampshire

I started the 2024 lambing season with 950 ewes in Somerset in an outdoor yard and what an amazing experience it was. The system worked by lambing in the yards, penning up and turning out to pasture once the lambs were a couple days old. I was extremely grateful for the experience, learning a new system and building my confidence.

I returned home ready to start lambing 1,200 ewes, where we were greeted by the 'delightful' weather.

Despite that we were getting some big strong lambs. Luckily with the weather starting to dry up, our outdoor drifting system was working much to our advantage. It has been an educational and rewarding season – such an amazing experience.



Megan has learnt a lot during lambing.

# Take your opportunities and balance farming, friends and family

By Bryan and Liz Griffiths



**Dear Liz...** Just a few advisory thoughts from your older self, some things I achieved and some I never got round to.

Be brave, but not foolish – finding that sweet spot is not easy. Life will throw you many challenges both personal and in your farming life. Look at the opportunities and weigh up the risks, and know these will change through your life. There will be a variety of land tenures, multiple schemes and different enterprises offered to you. Assess them and believe in your strengths. Look beyond the doubters and have confidence that you know yourself better than anyone else.

Take responsibility for your actions, celebrate the triumphs and learn from those that don't work out so well. Don't waste your younger years, the ability of your body and the agility of your mind will never be better. There is a big wide world out there so explore it within your own capabilities.

## Kindness

Be kind to yourself, your family and the wider world. Friends and neighbours are one of your best assets. They will understand your challenges and be on-hand for 'that chat'. Join in with your wider community, local sports, farm discussion groups.

**Dear Bryan...** You will receive a great deal of advice from the older generation, invariably resplendent in their tweed jacket and waistcoat.

But be respectful. These guys were once like you – young and ambitious. Their advice is well meaning, much of it sound, but always ask yourself is it relevant to my situation in the here and now. I recall a respected shepherd explaining the

## 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. Devon-based farming couple Bryan and Liz Griffiths share their experiences here. Both are active NSA members; Bryan is an NSA Vice President.



Bryan and Liz have farmed sheep for many years together.

Find something away from farming (and maybe farmers) that interests you as it will help give you some perspective. Make time for your family, the older ones will be gone one day, and the younger ones grow up so fast. The integrated lifestyle of farming means the work is always there, but it doesn't all have to be done today!

Talk less, listen more. We need to have the confidence to listen to the right words and we need to know when we have said enough. When you think you are having a disaster, remember you are not alone. There will be others who need

support as much as you.

And finally, when its midnight at that YFC disco and that lad who's been looking your way all night finally drags himself away from the bar and asks you to dance, know he may never look that good again, but it could just be the best decision you ever make.

impossibility of achieving more than 150% lambing saying: "You will find a ewe that has twins one year will have a single the next, its nature's way."

## Folly

Likewise, several sagely old gentlemen including the bank manager pointed out the folly of buying land at the inflated values of £1,000/acre. I'd encourage you to rent land if you can see a clear profit but buy if there's an outside chance of making the repayments.



A YFC disco was where it all began for Bryan and Liz.

Advances in breeds, management techniques and technology are inevitable. Study new ideas and concepts in detail but ask yourself if it represents real improvement and if it will work for you. History is littered with short-lived next big things.

Keep your business simple. There are obvious benefits to multiple and diverse enterprises, but it can lead to an endless chain of time-critical chores. Make time for your young family as you will not get a second chance. Your wife, business partner and soulmate is the key to everything!

Attend your regional NSA meetings and speak out. There is no knowing where it will take you.

Having re read my opening paragraph I am mindful of the advice I gave so many last autumn: "Sell your hoggets quick before the prices crash." Now where's my tweed jacket?

The Griffiths flock.





Merino rams are used on the farm.

# Shear success for new NSA South East Region Chair

By Katie James, NSA

Susie Parish has come a long way since teaching herself to shear. After initial experiences filled with blood, sweat, tears and a lot of swearing, she is one of the country's leading shearers, forging a career from a passion for wool.

Growing up on a smallholding near Alton, Hampshire, it was by chance Susie first picked up a handpiece.

"Our regular shearer didn't turn up and so, with the assistance of a book, I taught myself to shear, at first with hand shears before moving on to a motorised hand piece. There were tears and an aching back but I persevered and slowly got better," she explains.

Taking her first lambing job at just 16, then continuing with shepherding jobs following a youth training scheme course at Sparsholt College, Susie gained much valuable experience.

"It all escalated from there. I had intended to complete a sheep management course but I was learning so much from the opportunities given to me by local sheep farmers," she says. "I gained so much more than if I'd continued with education."

As well as shepherding Susie spent time working for her brother's contracting business and while baling straw in Well, Hampshire, met Neil and Emma Boyles who would later become her employers.

"Coming from a non-farming background I was able to give them some advice as they set about working on their former dairy farm. I then began working for them. When they wanted to start a sheep flock they asked me for further advice." Susie jokes: "My first piece of advice was to not get Southdowns so of course they got them anyway!"

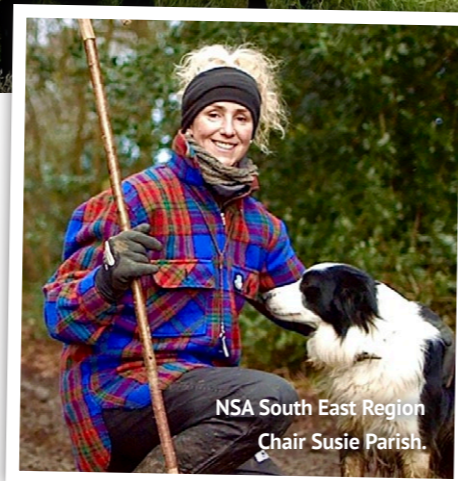
## Introduction

A visit to an NSA event led Emma to introduce a breed relatively unknown in the UK to the farm, the Gotland, chosen for its fine fleece quality.

Susie says: "I started to become more involved with the flock leading to the formation of the Grey Sheep Company 11 years ago."

From 20 Gotlands, the flock has grown to 500 sheep all farmed with wool and skins as the main focus of the business. "Meat is a by-product for us," explains Susie.

To produce the range of fleeces required the flock consists of three parts. "We have a small flock of Shetlands on conservation grazing that are also part of the breeding programme. The rest are a combination of Gotland ewes and a breed



NSA South East Region Chair Susie Parish.

we have created – the Stein – a cross between the Shetland, Gotland and Merino, using pure bred merino rams," adds Susie.

Susie is responsible for the management of the flock with all shepherding focused on supplying wool. "The flock is housed over winter and shorn in January when fleece quality is at its best. It also makes sense to house them then as the farm is quite wet and the Gotland breed is fine so don't have a lot of fat cover for protection from the elements. They are housed until the weather improves – usually in April," says Susie.

Only a proportion of the flock is lambed each year. Susie explains: "We are only breeding for our own replacements and for some lamb's wool so usually lamb in May or June once they are outside again. We don't feed concentrates. When they are housed, they receive hay, a general lick block and rock salt. They really are low input."

In contrast to most of the sector, Susie has also moved away from routine vaccination. She explains her reasons: "I wanted to reduce our inputs so began trialling the removal of vaccines with our small flock of Shetlands, knowing they were a hardy breed. I had no losses. I then moved on to the wethers with the same results. This progressed and ultimately, I stopped any vaccinations of lambs two years ago.

"Because our focus is wool production the flock is not under any pressure. I don't need them to grow fast and ewes are not being pushed maternally, so it can work for us, but I don't believe this would be the routine I'd follow if I were managing a commercial lamb flock."

All male lambs are rung soon after birth as wethers are needed for the flock, but ringing tails is often unnecessary with most of the flock having shorter tails.

Although wool is clearly the business focus a small amount will be sold as culls through local markets, plus some Gotlands are sent, aged 18 months, to the abattoir to acquire skins to sell.

The skins are salted by Susie but are then sent to tanneries in Sweden familiar with the Gotland breed. They will double back the skin, which is more desirable for the products they wish to sell.

## Goals

The aim and ethos of the business is to produce world class knitting yarns from a low input system, investing in the landscape, biodiversity and welfare. Susie is clearly proud of what it has achieved: "When we started on this journey, we received criticism from people saying it was just a hobby but we have shown there is the potential to make money, and in cases, more money from wool than from producing commercial lambs."

She is involved with most of the processing, from shearing to the dyeing and winding of fibres.

"We have had our own spinning mill for three years. We used to send it away for processing but we waited so long to get the wool back the decision was taken – with the aid of a European grant – to build our own facilities," Susie explains.

Apart from the scouring of the freshly shorn wool the farm completes all the processing itself. Every other year, an artic lorry's load of wool is sent to Bradford, Yorkshire, for scouring and this supplies the business with fleece for the next two years.

The yarns are sold globally to knitters and weavers with key markets in the USA, South Korea, China and Australia. "We export a lot as well as selling to the UK market," says Susie.

Sales are made online and through trade shows here and internationally, alongside a few open days on farm.

Susie adds: "Knitting yarn is a tactile and visual thing so it is still important to get out and meet customers."

Although the business is going well Susie explains the farm could not sustain a larger flock but this makes the job workable for her with other shearing commitments, NSA responsibilities and her recently announced role as British Wool Ambassador for England.

She is also a British Wool judge and shearing instructor, the latter being something Susie never expected to do. She explains: "I finally went on a British Wool shearing course, even though



Gotlands form the basis of most of the farm's flock.

## Farm facts

- Mixed breed flock focused on fine wool production.
- Unusually the flock includes more than 200 wethers.
- Lambs are naturally weaned.
- The business sells British yarn globally.
- Susie is NSA South East Region Chair, a British Wool Ambassador, competitive shearer and helps run a sheepdog training clinic.

I'd already sheared for many years, with Alan Derryman, well known in NSA South West Region, instructing. There were quite a few beginners so I ended up helping them, which led to Alan suggesting I became an instructor.

"Instructing is hard work, especially with complete beginners. It's more exhausting than shearing yourself, but I really enjoy it. Shearing can open many doors and introduce you to many people. You can earn good money and travel the world doing it. They haven't found a robot that can shear a sheep better than a human either!"

## Shearing

Susie's enthusiasm for shearing sees her compete across the country annually, achieving much success last year at the Royal Highland Show, Great Yorkshire Show and the Royal Welsh Show. "I am very competitive," Susie admits.

This has helped open doors with numerous appearances on television and radio providing

opportunity to promote the industry, shearing and the qualities of wool.

With much debate on the future for the wool industry Susie remains hopeful. She comments: "There is a mindset among many farmers that wool is just a by-product but this must be changed. It's the ultimate sustainable fibre and great for capturing carbon. Yes, there is a cost for harvesting wool and its current value isn't great but I'm confident it has a bright future as it's so versatile."



Susie has promoted the qualities of wool on TV and radio.

"We received criticism from people saying it was just a hobby but we have shown there is the potential to make money from wool."

Susie Parish

# Sending bigger wool volumes equals higher returns for members

British Wool is reporting 'slightly better' returns for most core wool types this year compared to last.

It says the average sale price was higher for the 2023 season but a significant drop in wool volumes had a detrimental impact on the handling cost per kilo due to the depot network operation costs being shared over a lower volume of wool.

Wool is a global commodity with the UK producing just 2% of world supply. The prices British Wool says it is achieving at auction are on a par with or slightly ahead of those being achieved for equivalent types of New Zealand wool, and ahead of wool prices in the Republic of Ireland and other EU countries. The global market is not delivering the returns farmers need for wool in any market.

## Prices

Andrew Hogley, British Wool Chief Executive, says: "Global wool prices strengthened towards the end of 2023 before falling back again early this year. British wool is selling but not at the prices its members need. Welsh Mountain and Swaledale types are under the most pressure and are selling at prices well below handling costs. These types have to compete with wool from the Middle East, which is available on global markets at very low prices."

The fleeces shorn in the spring and summer of last year were much lighter than in previous

years due to the hot dry summer of 2022 and the lack of grass affecting nutrition in the growing season. Mr Hogley highlighted this also had a significant impact on British Wool. "The majority of British Wool's costs relate to its depot network and are largely fixed in nature. While it is consistently striving for efficiencies the impact of lighter fleeces was significant. The more wool British Wool handle the more cost effective it is as an organisation. Every 500 additional tonnes



Shearing is off to a slow start due to the wet weather.

received reduces our operating cost by around 1.5p/kg. The more wool sent the better the returns will be for all British Wool members."

British Wool says it is also working to develop new revenue streams to support returns. Last year it generated £150,000 of revenue from its traceability scheme and by grading wool on behalf of farmers.

Over the last five years British Wool has also successfully increased the number of buyers

participating in the wool auction to boost competition and strengthen demand.

Mr Hogley recognises the current returns for wool are disappointing but notes the business is putting the foundations in place for long-term improvements in wool returns.

## Positives

More brands are now specifying British Wool in their products and the number of licensees has increased from 88 to 153 over the last 12 months. Growing this base is essential if British Wool is to differentiate the UK clip from the commodity market and achieve better returns. Innovative new products and uses for wool continue to evolve, offering new markets and providing truly sustainable alternatives to non-biodegradable alternatives.

Mr Hogley concludes: "I'm optimistic about the future. The focus on the environmental and sustainability credentials of British Wool is gaining traction with brands and we need to build on this to drive demand and improve returns."

"British Wool is committed to creating long-term value for sheep farmers. There's no doubt prices need to improve further but there are many initiatives in place starting to deliver benefits and secure long-term value. By sticking together British Wool believes continued effort, determination and innovation can build a positive future for wool."

*Quiz British Wool about its approach to tackling the issues that depress the value of wool at NSA Sheep 2024 in July.*



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# Adapting to climate change: Things to consider and implement

By Jeremy Moody, CAAV

The UK's wettest 18 months on record may have made us more aware of the force of climate change than the hot dry summer did in 2022.

Both show the increasingly eccentric extremes of weather we now have to cope with, their range bringing a real challenge to management. In a world of increasing risks we must look ahead to help future proof businesses.

Most official policy is to mitigate climate change, reducing net emissions, removing fossil fuels from power generation and using renewable electricity.

At farm level, we must adapt. The farm is what we control. Even if mitigation succeeds, more climate change is coming. We will see more change if mitigation is less successful. Either way, farmers using land and resources in all weathers and in exposed supply chains will have to adapt. Whether looking at a building or future policy, it is prudent to think ahead.

## Opportunity

This is about opportunity as well as precaution, at each point embedding future proofing when it can be most easily afforded but now considering the risks of not acting when it could be done best. Each step will be a question of what is appropriate, practical and economically viable, a judgment that should consider the costs of not adapting.

Adaptation includes strengthening resilience to greater shocks and taking advantage of the opportunities change can offer. I expect produce purchasers and lenders to ask more about how these and other sustainability issues are being

considered, asking for how this is recorded.

The UK's largest risk appears to be flooding with waterlogged land as well as rivers. Some farms may need to move or protect fixed equipment or even steadings, possibly prompted by insurers. Other risks are:

- Storms.
- Periods of sustained high temperatures and drought – for example, four weeks at 40°C.
- Drought at other times of year, with associated wildfires.
- New pests, parasites and diseases.

All while we could still have intense cold snaps.

Global supply chains will be more exposed and affected by political instability. This can be bad, but also might see some production opportunities displaced to the UK from more exposed regions of the world.

First, this is about management and attitude, reviewing the position, identifying risks and setting an approach. At a very general level, some farms will continue to specialise (perhaps more efficient but with more risk) while others will diversify (possibly more resilient but spreading management, investment and other resources).

Livestock keepers can consider breeds and types of management, such as breeding for less winter hardiness.

Government schemes need to be considered on their business merits. They may offer practical assistance in building resilience or investing for the future, including using nature to reinforce resilience. The eye should be on future profit and self-reliance when schemes might change or disappear. Keeping options open can be important



– the wettest part of the farm might suit paid habitat but, if kept available for stock, it could be the last useful grazing in a very dry season.

## Soils

Resilience requires looking after soils, improving organic matter and structure, keeping soils absorbent without compaction. Liver rot in sheep prompted James Elkington's great breakthrough in underdrainage more than 250 years ago. Mixed species pasture offers drought resilience. Trees, in hedges or wood pasture, can provide shade and assist soils in the coming decades.

Ask yourself worst-case scenario questions. Are buildings and key infrastructure above flood risk? Can roofs, gutters, downpipes and drains handle downpours? Where would water go? Harvested for storage or to sacrifice areas? It becomes still more important to separate rain and storm water from dirty water.

How might access routes, tracks, bridges and culverts as well as fences be affected? How might livestock be evacuated from flooded land? How is fodder ensured or protected?

Houses can be made more resistant with non-return valves for drains and sanitation, concrete flooring, tiling floors and lower walls, electrical circuits at ceiling height and raised sockets, airbrick covers and flood barriers for doors.

On-farm generation and storage of electricity, supported by Defra's barn roof solar scheme, could displace more expensive power and offer resilience in storms or grid weaknesses.

There will be different answers for different farms but hopefully coming out of the wet weather allows a moment to step back, take advice and seek perspective, and look ahead to what might be done for the next couple of decades as climate change advances.



Fencing water courses protects stock and prevents water contamination.

# Protecting water quality can benefit the environment, land and livestock

In the face of increased environmental pressures highlighted by the incessant rain we've already had this year, it's worth putting water security higher up the agenda.

For anyone interested in accessing environmental grants to maintain and improve water quality, Charlie Beaumont of Severn Trent Water suggests investigating local funding schemes to alleviate costs, saying they can often provide benefits for livestock health and grassland productivity too.

"There are a range of schemes available – from localised schemes provided by water companies to Defra's Catchment Sensitive Farming and Countryside Stewardship offers – but in my experience not everyone is fully aware of what applies to them."

He stresses the importance of protecting water quality from contamination and run-off as it also protects flock health and soil health. "If flocks have direct access to a river or brook for drinking, there's a risk of water contamination from nutrients, bacteria and parasites such as cryptosporidium," he says.

Sheep can also become infected with crypto by consuming contaminated water. "If lambs are drinking from water where there's crypto present, this can cause scours and lead to weight drop-off, affecting finishing times and overall productivity. So, it's important to keep sheep well away from any watercourses, with robust fencing, and provide another biosecure drinking source instead," he adds.



## Funding options

Looking for funding for post and wire fencing, sheep netting and permanent or temporary electric fencing will help alleviate the implementation costs explains Mr Beaumont.

"Hardstanding helps maintain a flat, level surface around the trough, protecting the soil structure from becoming boggy and benefits foot health too. It's important to make sure livestock can still access plenty of water, and there may be local or government funding to cover the cost of additional troughs and hard bases, water pipes and pumps," he suggests.

Another way to help protect water quality and enhance pasture productivity is by incorporating herbal leys into grazing systems. "We've seen herbal ley mixes play an important role in protecting soil health and structure across sheep grazing land during such a wet winter. Their deep and varied root systems do a great job of helping to reduce soil erosion and prevent fields from being churned up," Mr Beaumont explains.

"Producers I've worked with who have planted herbal leys alongside a mob grazing system have seen extra benefits. By grazing different paddocks

intensively with regular rotations, they've allowed the pasture enough time to recover, avoiding overgrazing and reducing soil compaction. This helped prevent water run-off into nearby watercourses and keep nutrients in the soil to feed back into pasture growth. The deep roots improve soil aeration, allowing better water infiltration meaning pasture is better at withstanding hot and dry conditions, as there's still moisture supplied through the soil's store, helping to keep pastures growing through summer."

Mr Beaumont says to contact your local water provider and find out what's available and the best options for you farm.

Severn Trent offers advisory services and some match-funding for farms within its water catchment. More at [www.stwater.co.uk/steps](http://www.stwater.co.uk/steps).



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# Louping ill: Protecting your flock in a changing climate

By Andrew Kelloe, Moredun 

With tick numbers rising, their geographical spread increasing and activity now being reported all year round, it's important to familiarise yourself with the disease risks to you and your flock.

*Ixodes ricinus*, the sheep tick, is the most common tick in the British Isles and is the main vector for louping ill, tickborne fever, babesiosis (redwater fever), tick pyaemia, lyme disease (Borrelia) and more recently tick-borne encephalitis. Ticks can be infected and transmit more than one pathogen at the same time, explaining the variations seen in clinical signs and response to treatment.

Louping ill is of particular concern for the UK sheep sector, with surveillance indicating it is increasing in areas where ticks are prevalent. It affects the central nervous system and is principally found in sheep and red grouse but occasionally causes disease in humans, cattle, horses, goats, dogs, pigs, red and roe deer, llamas and alpacas.

When a tick injects louping ill virus into a sheep, from six to 19 days later some of the animals may show clinical signs. In areas where the disease is constantly present, many animals develop mild infections with only a few progressing towards neurological signs.

After this, the antibody response in the host eliminates the virus from the bloodstream and provides strong immunity for up to six months, sometimes longer if the sheep is naturally

challenged with the virus again. Young lambs are protected by antibodies from maternal colostrum, offering solid protection for up to three months providing the lamb receives enough colostrum at birth and the ewe has previously been naturally infected or vaccinated (where vaccines are available).

The primary objective of any tick control programme is to reduce livestock exposure to tick bites, breaking the disease infection cycle. This involves five key areas vaccination, acaricide treatment, habitat and grazing management, as well as wildlife control.

## Vaccines

Prioritising vaccines for specific tick-borne diseases is crucial, although many of these vaccines are not available. Moredun has developed an effective, new generation vaccine to protect sheep against louping ill. This vaccine has recently been deemed eligible for limited marketing authorisation from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, which speeds up the process of bringing a niche vaccine to market.

An active collaboration has been set up with a potential commercial partner and Moredun. The two are working to get this vaccine to market as quickly as possible. NSA understands the urgent need for this vaccine and is assisting industry to make successful progress.

In cases of mixed infections or where no vaccine is available, a comprehensive approach is necessary to manage the risk effectively. Acaricide treatments, including organophosphate dips and synthetic pyrethroid pour-on/spot-on preparations,



Tick prevalence is increasing due to climate change and milder winters.

are licensed for use in sheep. Both groups are broad-spectrum insecticides that must be applied correctly and at the right dose rate for the right parasite being targeted to be fully effective.

In high-risk areas, acaricides remain a primary form of control for most sheep flocks. But their sustainability is a cause for concern due to the potential development of resistance in tick populations if these products are overused or used incorrectly. No tick treatments are currently licensed for use in UK cattle requiring veterinary prescriptions for off-label use.

## Habitats

Habitat management involves reducing humidity levels in the environment essential for tick survival. Controlling dense vegetation, particularly bracken, is crucial to lower tick populations. Grazing management focuses on avoiding high-density tick areas with susceptible stock, and technologies like GPS collars can aid controlled grazing without fencing.

Wildlife management is challenging but necessary, as unmanaged wildlife can undo the progress made in managing farmed livestock. Deer can carry large numbers of ticks, necessitating strategies to manage wildlife tick hosts.

A comprehensive tick management plan tailored to the specific farm or land area is essential, addressing the five key areas described. Investing in feasible long term programmes is important, as the cessation may result in ticks returning.

The growing presence of ticks in the UK poses a significant challenge. As these parasites continue to spread the incidence of tick-borne diseases rises. Therefore, implementing integrated tick control measures will contribute towards mitigating these risks.

More on tick-related disease diagnosis in the Apr/May edition of *Sheep Farmer*.



Maternally transferred antibodies can provide initial protection to naïve lambs.



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**References:** 1. The production costs of anthelmintic resistance in sheep managed within a monthly preventive drench program I.A. Sutherland, J. Shaw, R.J. Shaw *Veterinary Parasitology* 171 (2010) 300–304.  
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This year has been a difficult lambing for all.

TECHNICAL



# Learning from this year's lambing and reducing the risks for next season

By Fiona Lovatt & Phillipa Page, Flock Health Ltd

There is no doubt that for many this lambing season was incredibly challenging with the prolonged wet weather from December to April meaning most flocks were affected.

Alongside the weather, several flocks were severely affected with deformed lambs due to Schmallenberg virus. All of this put extra pressure on lamb and ewe survival rates and, importantly, on our own physical and mental health.

While it may be tempting to brush it all under the carpet and forget about your 2024 lambing, it's important to reflect on it, to consider what went well and what you could do differently to limit the impact of poor weather on future lambing seasons.

## Robust flocks

Flocks that survived relatively well in terms of limited lamb losses or impacts on the ewes tended to be flocks that were otherwise robust. Flocks with plans in place produced collaboratively with their trusted vet and/or adviser to address the common issues affecting flock performance, and flocks with reliable plans to deal with whatever might arise.

This may have been due to a focus on ensuring the ewes were in the correct body condition when they went to the tup. And they had analysed their forage and worked to provide a suitable diet to ensure the ewes were correctly fed. Maybe vaccination protocols for abortion and against

pasteurella and clostridials were appropriate and up to date. And there were already low levels of lameness in the flock, their thin ewes were monitored and acted upon, and parasites were controlled properly with due consideration of anthelmintic resistance.

Crucially on top of these routine measures, meticulous attention was paid to colostrum management and lambing protocols so all areas under their control were well managed.



Resilient flocks have plans in place to cover things under their control.

The resulting flock resilience can help to soften the blow from the impacts of the uncontrollable – terrible weather or unexpected disease. Lamb losses caused by hypothermia, exposure or starvation, and lambing difficulties due to deformed lambs plus the losses of deformed lambs themselves resulted in significant impacts on most flocks, but certainly less so where other factors, such as those causing abortion or high levels of lameness or poor colostrum quality, had been previously addressed.

## Looking forward

Whatever your personal story from lambing in 2024, now is the time to reassess your situation and decide what you need to do going forward. This is a great opportunity to chat with your vet – using the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway funding in England, Farming Connect opportunities in Wales

or Preparing for Sustainable Farming funding in Scotland – to carefully plan now in preparation for next year.

Prolonged wet weather affects the ewe's ability to feed and maintain her body condition, as well as impacting on the time and conditions she can rest and ruminant with ongoing impacts on her body reserves. In some cases, the

milder weather and more abundant grazing meant ewes produced oversized lambs or more needing birthing assistance. All this increased stress levels for you having to catch ewes outside in wet weather or ensuring there was plenty of shed supervision for these difficult lambings. Of course, deformities from Schmallenberg added to the difficulties and increased lamb mortality.

It is common to see rising cases of neonatal diseases, ewe metabolic diseases and mastitis when ewes are under pressure during lambing time and adverse weather conditions prevail. Good hygiene and timely colostrum are crucial at this time to minimise disease challenge. But persistently wet conditions both inside and out, as well as damp, wet fleeces, increases both the humidity and the load of bacterial challenge.

## Disease control

We heard of higher numbers of joint ill cases as a result of increased exposure to the bacterial contamination of sheds, in wet conditions under foot and/or on ewes fleeces and the reduced resilience in flock immunity due to stress. Other conditions such as orf and coccidiosis were reported more frequently, again both conditions that favour immunosuppressed stressed animals and thrive in moist conditions. The warmer temperatures also prompted an earlier hatch of nematodirus in some areas, catching out earlier lambing flocks.

As we write this, there is no doubt it has already been a difficult year. Grazing plans for outwintering, feed budgeting plans and the timing of housing through the winter were all disrupted by the wet winter and spring, and there will be knock-on effects to follow throughout the year ahead.

But as farmers and vets we are resilient, compassionate and determined to see the positives. The lamb price is currently good, which should help focus the mind on growing lambs as we aim to maintain good growth to command good prices.

Make sure you take the opportunity to book in with your vet to discuss what went well and to consider areas where improvements will ensure your flock is building future resilience. As we control many parameters and we push on to improve, we can better withstand the things out of our control.

And do not forget you are not alone. We are in this together and this year proved it as many faced a battering at lambing time. Getting together at shows or turning up to a discussion group, meeting up with friends and neighbours, linking up by phone, Whatsapp or even social media are all ways of finding support and giving support to others. Be sure to keep those contacts going and we'd love to stop to say hello if you see us at NSA Sheep Event in July.



Mitigate flock risks by engaging with vets and advisers.

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# Advice for pre-tupping nutrition

## Nutrition and ewe body condition have a big influence on ovulation rates and conception at mating.

Ewe nutrition in the run up to mating must be carefully considered to achieve good scanning results. With all these variations in weather and grass growth, the first thing to consider is the condition of the ewe before tupping, advises Paul Drake, Beef and Sheep Commercial Manager at Massey Feeds.

### Condition score ewes at weaning

Condition score of the ewes at weaning is a key focus area. Lambs should be weaned at least 8-10 weeks prior to mating to give ewes sufficient time to recover their body condition score (BCS).

- The BCS targets are:
- 2.5 for lowland ewes at weaning and 3.5 at mating.
  - 2.0 for hill ewes at weaning and 2.5 at mating.

Mr Drake explains: "One body condition score equates to 10% of the ewe's optimal weight. Therefore, a 70kg ewe will need to gain 7kgs to reach its target."

The sheep key performance indicator project shows ewes in poor condition – BCS 2.0 or below at weaning – still tended to have lower scanning rates despite reaching optimal BCS by mating. This highlights the importance of maintaining good ewe condition year-round, notes Mr Drake.

### Feeding ewes post-weaning

Another area to focus on is feeding ewes post-weaning. If body condition variances exist, ewes should be divided into groups after weaning: thin ewes, ewes at the right BCS and those that are too fat, advises Mr Drake. "This will make feeding and management easier", he adds.

"Lean ewes ovulate fewer eggs, which can mean fewer lambs, whereas overweight ewes ovulate more eggs but have a greater risk of embryonic deaths," he cautions.

It can take six to eight weeks to gain one unit of BCS on high-quality grass, so supplementary feeding may be required, he says. "For example, if a 70kg lowland ewe needs to gain 7kg (one BCS), her metabolisable energy requirements daily will be 15.4MJ, and she needs to consume 1.54kg DM per day. "Thin ewes should be given good grass or additional feed (such as Progrow nuts) to improve their BCS."

Mr Drake says ewes with a body condition score of less than two should be examined for worms, bad teeth, poor feet or other diseases. In comparison, fat ewes must be put on bare pasture to help them lose weight, but this needs to be managed so they get the right nutrition to cover maintenance to enable the foetus to develop, he adds.

### Tips for flushing ewes

For anyone flushing ewes, Mr Drake offers these tips. He explains the science behind flushing is to bring the follicles to maturity and ovulation within the shorter four-to-five-day oestrous cycle, which is triggered by hormonal changes. "Flushing the ewe on a rising plain of nutrition will vary from two to six weeks, depending on its condition.

"Ewes in good condition typically have good ovulation rates that will not be improved by a further rise in nutrition, but ewes under target will benefit. This is because ewes under condition have a reduction in ovulation rate of 0.45 per unit of BCS unless they are flushed on a rising plane of nutrition."

### Trace elements, vitamins and minerals

Trace elements, vitamins and minerals should also be investigated. "Deficiencies in trace elements can impair fertility, so feeding our Sheep General Purpose molassed bucket can be beneficial, especially if no other

mineralised feed is offered. This contains cobalt, which plays a key role in egg development and early gestation; selenium, which aids egg production and quality; and vitamin E, which is beneficial for lamb vigour and survivability."

### Don't forget rams

Ewes only make up half of the genetics, so do not overlook rams, warns Mr Drake. It is estimated that 30% of rams may be sub-fertile, so physical examinations should be carried out in advance of mating (see panel for tips).

"It is important to check your rams 10 weeks before tupping time because sperm production takes 6-10 weeks and rams need to be healthy to produce good-quality semen."

**To find out more about the Massey Feeds range of quality sheep diets and mineral supplements, please contact your Local Area Manager.**



## Ram MOT assessment

1. **Toes** – check locomotion, legs and feet.
2. **Teeth** – check for under or overshot jaws and molar abscesses.
3. **Testicles** – should have no lumps and must be firm.
4. **Tone** – aim for a body condition of 3.5-4.0.
5. **Treat** – ensure you are up to date with vaccinations.

# Tools for making the most of forage availability to improve lamb performance

By Bryn Hughes, independent consultant

Grass and forage crops underpin the UK sheep sector with more than 90% of the national flocks energy requirement coming from grazing. This makes grass utilisation a key competitive advantage for us.

Individual farms vary enormously in their productivity off grass and most sheep farms will identify areas where they can improve. There are endless variations of UK sheep production systems and a one size fits all approach is not suitable. Identifying individual farm performance and working towards improvements is a key management tool.

Using lambs growth as an example, it's important to understand the energy levels of lamb food and how this affects lamb performance. High energy diets are required for lambs to grow quickly and for lambs to perform they need sufficient quantity. Figures suggest utilising an additional ton of dry matter per hectare is worth more than £200 and can have a significant impact on the profitability of the sheep enterprise.

Trying to supply quantity and quality food is a major challenge, and if its not done correctly leads to poor nutrition, with knock-on problems for your flock – poor lamb survival and poor fertility to name a few. Many farms are not achieving higher target growth rates and there is also a huge variation. Identifying a target growth rate for your own farm and working towards achieving this should be a priority.



Assessing fields helps understand nutrition availability.

## Grass growth

Grass measuring is always beneficial. Some farmers utilise plate meters and digital methods to record grass growth but it doesn't need to be that fancy. A good starting point for grass measuring is a golf ball and a soft drink can – the golf ball height gives your residual height and a soft drink can gives your pre-graze height in rotational systems.

There are many benefits to rotational grazing and some aspects of rotational grazing can be employed on most sheep farms. Rotational systems allow the grass a rest period, which in turn allows the grass plant to build up root reserves, increase leaf area and photosynthesise. The ideal rest period depends on how quick the leaf grows back. It can be as short as five days in May and up to 30 days in the winter. Try to allow a 21-day rotation in most systems, which can be shortened if grass growth is quick.

If grass growth is slow or you are struggling to provide more than 5cm of grass for the flock consider the following actions:

- Apply artificial fertiliser to fields.
- Reduce the stocking rate.
- Wean lambs if grass is short – lambs often compete with ewes for grass so consider early weaning.
- Bring more ground into the rotation.
- Creep feed lambs.

The amount of ground required for rotational systems vary significantly with grass growth performance. Regular measurements can be used to identify poorly performing paddocks in rotational systems. Those underperforming should be on your target list for rejuvenation.



Quality and sufficient quantity forage is critical for lamb growth.

## Simple field evaluation

- Assess the grass species in the paddock to see if they are sown species or weed species.
- A target of 50%+ of more sown species is desirable.
- Control weeds and introduce new seeds.
- Phone apps are useful if grass identification skills are rusty.
- Soil sample and address deficiencies.

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Weaning can be stressful making lambs more susceptible to other issues.

## Management strategies to consider to reduce stress in lambs at weaning

By Rhys Hopkins, Prostock Vets, Carmarthen



Now lambing is over and lambs are hopefully growing well with some sun on their backs, inevitably come the thoughts about how and when to start weaning.

Weaning is often the biggest stress during a lamb's lifetime. Along with having a big impact on daily liveweight gains, it can also cause a drop in the lamb's immune system making issues more likely to rear their heads. Making sure we are on top of potential issues before weaning starts and being proactive when thinking about preventative treatments can provide big potential benefits for future lamb performance.

### Weaning considerations

Top things to think about when you are planning to wean are lamb weight and the weaning process itself, vaccination protocols, intestinal parasites (worms and coccidiosis) and trace element deficiencies, for example cobalt, selenium, copper and iodine.



Blood sampling lambs can highlight any forage deficiencies.

From six weeks old lambs usually get more energy from grass than milk meaning lambs could be weaned at this point. But, weaning lambs at less than 30% of their potential adult weight can have lasting effects and can cause lambs to become stunted and never reach their true potential weight. Therefore, it is recommended lambs are ideally 25kg before weaning with an absolute minimum weight of 16kg. If many lambs are under 25kg it is beneficial to introduce lamb creep to help the lambs' digestive tract develop further before weaning takes place. Introducing the post-weaning diet early (up to three weeks pre-weaning) to reduce the diet change at weaning can also help reduce the growth check often seen at this time.

Due to the drop in immunity around weaning, lambs become more susceptible to clostridial diseases and pasteurella, which are two of the main causes of sudden death in growing lambs. There are numerous vaccines on the market to protect against these diseases. Ewes can be vaccinated pre-lambing to provide cover for young lambs via colostrum but this cover only lasts up to eight weeks and has often waned by the time weaning occurs, leaving lambs vulnerable. Lambs can be vaccinated from three weeks of age and should receive two doses four weeks apart for full immunity. Getting at least one dose in pre-weaning can help reduce deaths associated with the decrease in immunity around weaning.

### Nematodirus

Worms and other intestinal parasites can have a negative impact on daily liveweight gains and thrift in lambs. The first parasite young lambs are likely to encounter is nematodirus. This worm overwinters on pasture and hatches after a period of warm weather; if a mass hatch occurs it can cause scour and death usually in six to 12-week-old lambs grazing pastures which were grazed by similar aged lambs the previous year.

Unlike other worms, by the time eggs are seen on faecal egg counts it is too late and, due to our weather patterns, the hatch can occur at different times every year. Therefore, the best way to tackle this parasite is to follow the nematodirus forecasts for your area via the SCOPS website. This will



Regular FECs can help monitor and manage parasite burdens.

allow you to time the drenching of at-risk lambs appropriately, as drenching too early will have no effect and drenching too late could risk gut damage to the lambs and even potential deaths.

For other intestinal worms and coccidiosis, faecal egg counts can be very helpful for monitoring burdens and targeting treatment especially when used alongside daily liveweight gains. Starting early in the season and getting a baseline faecal egg count done pre-weaning allows any parasites to be identified and then the correct treatment selected and undertaken if needed. This will help prevent these burdens from affecting lambs over the weaning process.

Repeated faecal egg counts throughout the grazing season can be of benefit. They allow wormer resistance to be investigated, pasture burdens identified and parasite problems diagnosed before signs are seen in lambs.

### Faecal egg counts

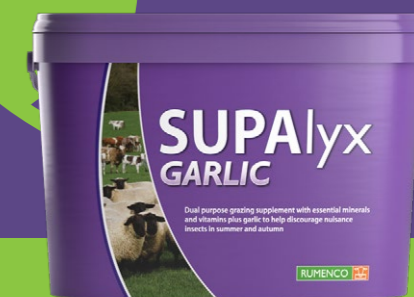
Taking samples for faecal egg counts can seem arduous, but these samples can be taken during routine shepherding. The ideal faecal egg count sample is a ping-pong ball-sized sample from 15 lambs in the group. The samples must be fresh, ideally voided at the time of sampling and kept in a sealed pot or ziplock bag. If samples are not going to be analysed that day keeping the samples in the fridge is advised to prevent any of the eggs from hatching and giving a falsely low count.

Trace elements play a huge role in lambs' metabolism and immune status meaning deficiencies can have a big impact on their performance, due to poor growth rates and increased susceptibility to infections. Testing for trace elements can be done in a couple of different ways. The gold standard is to test liver samples. But this cannot be done easily on live sheep so is usually only done post-mortem. Grass and forage samples can be analysed to identify trace element supply in the current diet. The most common way of identifying trace element status is to blood sample six to 10 lambs from a group. Lambs can be sampled from around six weeks of age, allowing ample time for any deficiencies to be corrected before weaning.

Trace elements can be supplemented in numerous ways and they all have pros and cons, meaning a mixed approach is often needed on farm. Drenches can supply a large amount of trace elements quickly, but they usually only last a few weeks. Boluses can supply trace elements for up to six months but can be difficult to administer especially in smaller lambs and can often take more time to correct big deficiencies. There are also some long and short-acting injectables available for most trace elements that can help target single deficiencies but can be difficult to administer in young lambs.

As with all on-farm management strategies, I'd recommend discussing these topics with your vet to ensure the options selected are applicable to your farm and your flock.

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# Grass management and measurement paying off for Welsh coastal farm

TECHNICAL

Measuring and calculating grass availability through a Farming Connect project is helping a Welsh sheep farm to prevent forage shortfalls by flagging up impending deficits 10 days earlier than before.

Challenging and changing weather patterns are aspects of farming most agricultural businesses need to tackle, while remaining profitable and sustainable.

A Ceredigion coastal sheep farm has identified its grassland management as the most suitable and sustainable option to deal with these challenges while boosting production. Penlan farm, Llanrhytyd, Cardigan Bay is home to Glyn, his wife Eleri and sons Dewi and Ifan Davies, who manage this coastal holding to finish high quality Welsh Lamb.

The south facing land has shallow soil presenting challenges for grass growth in dry summers. The grazing platform of 86 acres (35ha) is rotationally grazed with a flock of 250 mixed lowland crossbred ewes and lambs sold largely finished on a deadweight basis from mid-June.

Talking about the land he manages with his family, Glyn explains: "We have very shallow land and part of it is coastal with about 20 acres (8ha) facing the sea. Weather is the biggest challenge we have. We burn easy here and getting grass to grow at the right time can be difficult."

## New ideas

Understanding a change in tactic was needed, Glyn worked with his sons to find a solution to their grass shortage and the farm joined national grass growth monitoring GrassCheck GB just over two years ago. GrassCheck GB is part-funded by HCC and has a network of 50 sheep, beef and dairy farmers monitoring weather, grass growth and grass quality across Great Britain. The Davies family are one of nine Welsh farms involved in the project.

"We've been involved for two years now, and I've let the boys carry on with the project. I didn't think it was going to work but after seeing it now in the second year we are growing more grass. For the first time in 15 years, we have managed to cut one small field of silage out that was getting ahead of the sheep. Fertiliser use and our input costs are down and we're selling more lambs at a better weight for a better price," says Glyn.

"We are getting more self-sufficient and sustainable and by grazing cells rather than the whole field, we can manage the grass better. By growing more grass, we can do a better job of it."

Ifan adds: "We have a weather station and a plate meter supplied as part of the project. It's interesting to follow the weather pattern, and that feeds into the GrassCheck GB model. The WhatsApp group is also helpful, and you can pick up new ideas.

"This way of farming also means budgeting and seeing what you've got in front of you and changing how you manage the land to suit the weather but also making sure you have enough grass."



Improved grassland management has increased lamb yield.

While this means a new way of working, the benefits are tangible. "Last year we managed to get our first lambs away in the third week of May, ahead of time. We usually see a drop after that, but we just kept on selling. The ewes and lambs were getting fresh grass every two to three days and they just kept on going. There wasn't a pinch point for forage at all.



Cell grazing has increased grass availability at Penlan.

## Ewe condition

"The ewes themselves are probably in the best condition they have ever been. They looked good in the autumn when they went to the tup, scanning percentage was up with more twins than usual and in fact we're seeing about 65 extra lambs than in previous years and the ewes are healthy," adds Ifan.

Hear more about opportunities to improve sustainability and profitability at the HCC open day showcasing GrassCheck GB and RamCompare industry projects on Tuesday 25th June. [More information at info@hybucig.cymru](mailto:info@hybucig.cymru).



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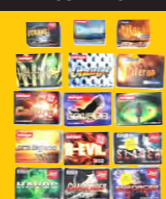
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# Why you should consider introducing more plantain into the mix

In the UK plantain now commonly features in herbal leys as 2-5% of the mix, but could this plant do more for lactating ewes and finishing lambs?

Independent grassland consultant Sara Gregson says it's worth remembering wild plantains are a common weed of cultivated land in the UK and also grow around many farmyards.

She says: "While many native plantains tend to have a prostrate growth habit, small leaves, low growth activity and yield poorly, they can be found in wet and dry areas and from sea level upwards, adapting quickly to their growing conditions. They can also tolerate drought and common pests and diseases."

In the 1980s plant breeders in New Zealand started to develop agriculturally productive varieties, with more upright growth, larger leaves, high activity all year round and high yields up to 15tDM/ha, although 8-12tDM/ha are more likely in the UK.

## Rotational grazing

"Plantain is highly palatable and many studies have shown that in a mixed pasture animals will selectively graze it, making rotational grazing essential to maximise its output. It has a higher crude protein value than perennial ryegrass and is rich in minerals due to its deep fibrous roots," she adds.

In the mid 2000s in New Zealand, farmers started to use it as the dominant or only species in a sward. By 2010 high plantain mixtures were being widely grown as a specialist lactating ewe and lamb finishing crop.

"I can see high plantain systems working on UK sheep farms," says Monty White of DLF Seeds, who has worked with many New Zealand sheep farmers.

"Including red clover might be more acceptable to farmers here, and perhaps a little grass to attract government funding, but the principles remain the same. Ewes and lambs would rotationally graze the pasture from April to June, shifting every three days, giving each paddock a 20-30 day rest period.

"By doing this, more lambs will finish off their mothers, and ewes will also be in better condition at weaning. This means dry ewes can go onto permanent grassland with no worry about them having to gain weight before tugging. The remaining lambs would keep rotating around the plantain

pasture, with red clover starting to dominate from mid-summer, ideal for finishing.

## Multiple uses

"Once lambs have gone, replacements could graze it to reach their pre-tugging weight. If ground conditions allow, it can be grazed in the late autumn and early winter, before being resting. Older lambs graze in February to set it up for ewe and lamb grazing again," says Mr White.

Research at the SRUC has identified plantain as a bio-active forage that can reduce the need for worming. In New Zealand, lactating ewes with twin lambs grazing plantain exhibited a 48% reduction in faecal egg counts (FEC) compared to those grazing perennial ryegrass. At weaning, ewes grazing plantain had a lower FEC than those grazing perennial ryegrass.

"The main thing to avoid is lambing on plantain-rich pasture, due to its high calcium content. If pregnant ewes graze plantain they will fail to mobilise their own calcium reserves for milk production and are at risk of hypoglycaemia," Mr White concludes.



A plantain and red clover mix can boost performance.

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## Sowing plantain

Plantain has a small seed and should be sown no deeper than 10mm with good seed-to-soil contact. All hard-to-kill perennial weeds should be controlled before sowing and an application of starter fertiliser added when grown without clover. Plantain is very responsive to nitrogen fertiliser and spring sowing is preferable.

Grazing can begin six to eight weeks after sowing. Nitrogen fertiliser can be applied after each grazing. Plantain will remain productive for two to five years, decreasing as more dominant grasses take over. Reseeding is essential for rejuvenating.



Plantain may have anthelmintic properties.

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# Findings help breed pasture-based sheep with naturally lower emissions

By Nicola Lambe, SRUC

Different strategies are being considered to reduce methane emissions, and sheep breeding is proposed as an effective way to achieve national mitigation targets.

Genetic improvement by selection has the advantage that benefits are obtained cumulatively over generations and remain permanent. The Grass to Gas project – involving research and industry partners from the UK, Ireland, France, Norway, Turkey, Uruguay and New Zealand – investigated strategies to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from pasture-based sheep systems, focusing on the potential contribution of two traits. These are feed efficiency in terms of individual feed intake to growth, and methane emissions.

## Feed efficiency

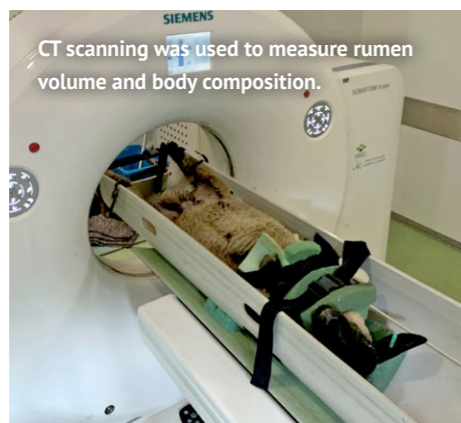
Feed efficiency trials in the UK using Texel cross Scotch Mule lambs after weaning were conducted with lambs fed in an indoor systems with grass nuts measured using feed intake recording equipment versus outdoor grazing. Lambs were sired by 10 performance recorded rams and progeny from each sire split between the two feeding groups.

Lambs were CT scanned to assess changes in body composition and also to measure rumen volume. The rumen plays an important role in ruminant food digestion. Previous research found sheep with larger rumen volumes, at the same liveweight, emit more methane.

Lambs finished on grass nuts indoors were heavier, grew quicker, and had more fat and muscle at the same liveweight than lambs grazing

outdoors. Challenges of maintaining good quality grazing during the dry summers of 2021 and 2022 may have contributed. But lambs grazed outdoors had larger rumen volumes post-trial.

Sire related differences in growth and carcass traits occurred, but offspring of the 10 sires ranked similarly indoor and outdoor. This means animals monitored indoors are more feed-efficient and will also likely be more feed-efficient at pasture.



Progeny from some sires were significantly more feed-efficient, confirming a genetic component. No effect of rumen volume on feed efficiency was found, implying it is unlikely we can use the automated images of rumen size captured during CT scanning to predict more feed-efficient animals.

Within the wider project, feed efficiency and methane emission traits were found to have similar heritability levels as growth and carcass traits, indicating the possibility to readily improve these sheep traits by selective breeding. Improving feed efficiency implies reducing feed intake, and consequently production costs, while maintaining production performance.

Differences of 10-20% in feed intake were found when comparing efficient and inefficient lambs, with no impact on production. From an environmental viewpoint, it was expected more efficient animals would emit less methane, due to lower feed intake. But results were not conclusive.

## Methane

Mitigation targets can be expressed as absolute methane emissions or methane intensity (methane per kg product). Improving productivity and reducing production inefficiencies favourably impacts methane intensity, but may increase absolute emissions. But direct genetic selection for low emitting animals reduces total methane emissions. Results suggest selection for lower methane emissions should be considered in the framework of a multi-trait selection index, allowing optimised genetic improvement across several important traits, even when some genetic associations are unfavourable.

Portable accumulation chambers (PACs) enable recording of methane emissions from individual sheep. This equipment can be used in grazing conditions with minimum intervention. Measurement of more animals can help accelerate the contribution of sheep breeding to methane mitigation. Modelling work within the project determined genetic selection could contribute around 30% of the total abatement potential for greenhouse gas mitigation in sheep.

Findings have led to further Defra-funded research, designed to develop a platform for incorporating genetic merit for low environmental impact into national sheep breeding schemes and provide a mechanism for national and global comparison.

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Neighbouring sheep can introduce scab to your flock.

TECHNICAL



# Working towards better sheep scab control in Northern Ireland

By Aurélie Aubry, AFBI and Paul Crawford, Paul Crawford Veterinary Services **afbi** AGRI-FOOD & BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE

Sheep scab continues to play havoc, having a detrimental impact on sheep welfare, the psychological wellbeing of farmers and the economic cost to the industry.

Despite this, there is limited research into the distribution of scab throughout Northern Ireland or understanding the barriers to control. Scab has been identified as a taboo subject, resulting in a reluctance to report suspicions of an outbreak, or

seek veterinary advice on diagnosis or treatment, resulting in under-reporting of cases.

The first step is to know, with confidence, the scab status of your flock. Recent work from across the UK has demonstrated simply looking at the sheep is insufficient. Due to an extended development phase early on in the disease, sheep infested with scab can appear perfectly normal. If your flock is in a higher risk situation – one with access to common grazing, that buys in sheep from flocks of unknown scab status, or where scab has been seen in your neighbourhood recently – blood testing is crucial to ensure your flock is scab free. Your vet can advise on the best time to sample and how many samples are needed.

## Dipping

If scab is identified it is imperative you correctly plunge dip the entire flock using an organophosphate (OP). Don't forget the rams, or the cull ewes in that field a mile away. It is essential the dip bath is correctly made up at the start of dipping and the OP in the bath is topped up at appropriate intervals to ensure each animal receives the correct effective treatment. Short-cuts might save time and money but will result in scab remaining on farm, and another round of dipping later in the year.

Ensure contract dippers work to the correct standards. Make sure there is a gate or door to

prevent the sheep leaving the bath too early in circular tub-type dippers, and animals spend a full minute in the dip and have their heads plunged twice during this time to ensure mites residing in the head/ears are also treated. Showers, spray systems or jettors should never be used as they will not give the correct treatment across the entire fleece, leaving untreated areas where mites can survive.

## Treatments

There are no pour-on products licensed for scab control. The injectable wormers can be used for scab control, but there are significant levels of resistance to these and the risk of a technical failure, even without resistance, is considerable. For example, missing one sheep because it jumps when being injected and the product ends up on the sheep rather than in it.

Other common causes include incorrect assessment of the weight of the heaviest sheep (underdosing) or failing to ensure any additional requirements, such as a second dose or moving sheep to truly scab-free pasture or housing as required with some treatments that do not provide protection against re-infestation. Injectables are not an easy alternative and, if used, should be followed up with a blood test at a time recommended by your vet to ensure the flock is scab-free.

If your flock is clear of scab, or you have eradicated it by dipping, then the next step is keeping scab out. Secure boundaries with double fences are critical. All incoming stock should be quarantined and either given a treatment or tested. Seek advice from your vet based on the sheep numbers, origin and local risk.

## Reporting

In 2019, a working partnership with farmers, vets and stakeholders across the sector formed to understand scab distribution and potential scab control. The project increased awareness and promoted best practice, while investigating farming practices, farmer attitudes and knowledge that may be control barriers. A self-reporting scheme was successfully developed and implemented, and the social and environmental impact of scab in Northern Ireland investigated.

Barriers to adoption of effective strategies include knowledge gaps in scab mite biology, effective treatment and prevention strategies. Poor practice, including use of unauthorised treatments, as well as fear of state control and the costs of diagnosis and treatment are key aspects future control programme need to consider.

The collaborative work enabled vets to visit more than 100 farms to talk about scab and ensure its accurate diagnosis (using blood samples) and

treatment, providing a model for addressing a disease, previously taboo. By starting with the end-user, this approach drove engagement with farmers and vets, underpinned by research and ultimately delivered a positive animals health and welfare impact on-farm.

New insights on the environmental and social impacts of sheep scab suggest the main performance indicators affected are ewe liveweight and body condition (leading to increased mortality and culling rate), followed by lambing percentage and lamb growth (both pre and post weaning). Farm-level modelling demonstrated reducing sheep scab prevalence can significantly reduce the farm carbon footprint, driven by improvements to flock performance, with the reduction of non-productive animals and the increase in overall product (kg of lamb per ewe).

## Control

Socio economic data from the project provided new insights into other important factors hindering the effective control of sheep scab. A lack of cooperation and coordinated effort among farmers is often an issue in affected cluster areas. The prevalence of the short-term (conacre) land rental system in Northern Ireland, the lack of adequate training on best practice,



Farmers in Northern Ireland are working on eradicating scab.

and availability of sheep dippers can also act as a barrier to effective and sustainable control measures. Importantly, there is clear evidence of the emotional pressure that can result from the diagnosis of the disease on farms, leading to a feeling of helplessness. Greater support towards diagnosis, treatment choices and costs would help to move towards a much-needed better control of sheep scab.

TECHNICAL



There is a need for greater support for scab diagnosis and treatment.

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# DNA dog fingerprinting helps tackle continued sheep attacks by dogs

In the hope of securing more prosecutions for dog attacks on sheep in the future, NSA is enthusiastically supporting the Canine DNA Recovery Project to develop best practice methods for collecting dog DNA from livestock crime scenes.

Following two years of work by Dyfed Powys Police and Gwent Police, forensic wildlife specialist Nick Dawney has already made inroads into the best way to acquire dog DNA from livestock after an attack.

This was rolled out to a further eight rural crime teams in May this year – Cheshire, Cornwall, Cumbria, Devon, Dorset, Kent, North Yorkshire and Northumbria, Kent, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall – and NSA is pleased to be supporting the further research this has facilitated.

## Sampling

Mr Dawney explains: "The research highlights the importance of the amount of DNA you collect at the crime scene. If you get too little DNA the forensic matching won't work, so getting the most dog DNA at the time of sampling is key.

"There are different ways to collect dog DNA from sheep and some methods work better than

others. But with a small dataset I'd be dubious making recommendations to change police practice, hence why we launched the second phase of work last month."

The second phase aims to collect a bigger dataset to see if the same pattern emerges. If so, Dr Dawney can then make evidence-based recommendations about the best sampling method to use after an attack.



Responsible dog ownership remains high on NSA's agenda.

"We've sought help from NSA, as well as vets, farmers unions and livestock keepers to collect more data using DNA collection kits invented for the project," he adds.

The kits are called LAW dog kits and contain everything you need to collect a DNA sample and a set of instructions. Additional sample collection training is available through QR codes on the box. The kits are being rolled out and for the next two

years samples returned using the kits can be sent via the police to Liverpool John Moores University for DNA analysis.

## DNA kits

The kits are being offered free and there are almost 2,500 available nationwide. The kits are being distributed by the local rural crime teams, with a small amount available from NSA, NFU Mutual and FUW.

The kits could be used in the future as part of a criminal investigation, but before any new detection methods are allowed in forensic casework they must undergo a validation process, being subjected to a series of rigorous trials to ensure data collected using the new method is robust and trustworthy.

Dr Dawney concludes: "The data we're collecting now is for kit validation. Seeing how each kit performs and how different users perform should hopefully demonstrate everyone can use them. If that happens future kits could form a common part of the criminal investigation into livestock attacks.

"We've tried to make them as simple as a covid kit. The first time you use them it can be daunting, that's why it's important to watch the video and have someone help you, because you may only get one go."

NSA will update as the project progresses.

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For more information contact the Secretary:  
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[www.roughfellsheep.com](http://www.roughfellsheep.com)

**SWALEDALE SHEEP BREEDERS ASSOCIATION**

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# Following the flock

We visit Devon, Gloucestershire and Hampshire to catch up with NSA officeholders.

## Peter Delbridge

NSA Chairman, Devon



In mid-May we still had a few late Exlana ewes to lamb, while the Exmoor Horns and ever dwindling number of North Country Mules had finished a week earlier.

I didn't stick to my traditional start day for lambing between Lady Day (25th March) and 1st April. How fortunate that turned out to be. We only had to endure a week of mud and rain before the dry weather arrived mid-April and consequently, we have had a decent lambing despite one day bringing rain, sleet and a strong, cold North East wind.

While nobody I've spoken to has had an easy lambing, and some have had an absolute nightmare with Schmallenberg, at least the finished trade for last season's hogs and new season lambs reached dizzy heights. Time will tell if the supply of finished lambs in the autumn will allow processors to blend



out a low enough average to compensate for that hot spring trade.

Things I have learnt this lambing. My crooks for catching ewes and lambs need to be an inch longer each year. And wellies, while easy to put on/take off, are no match for a good pair of leather boots, keeping my feet dry, warm and supported.

Now there's time to recover before summer work by attending a show or an NSA event. Hopefully I'll see you there.

## Sophie Wernham

NSA South East Region Committee Member, Hampshire



With 1,800 North Country Mules lambing outside I think we have been fortunate with the weather and I'm feeling relieved to see the end of lambing 2024.

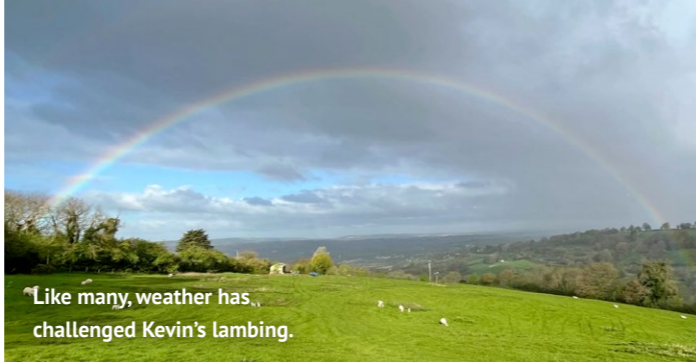
The rain stopped a couple of days before the first lambs hit the floor, and it's hardly rained since. Scanning was slightly down for us this year with an average of 182%, although I was glad to not see as many triplets expected than previous years. With the help of a good team, overall lambing has gone well and we've successfully fostered most lambs onto single ewes, resulting in only 15 orphans in the shed!

May has been busy gathering all ewes and lambs to put on fly cover and the groups mobbed to make checking easier and less time consuming. For the first time the wet, miserable winter left us with a few hogs in May, with the last few finished late May/early June.

A recent visit on the farm from our local YFC was a brilliant opportunity to show and educate the next generation about what we do.



With a good team Sophie is pleased with lambing this year.



"Like many, weather has challenged Kevin's lambing."

## Kevin Harrison

NSA Policy & Technical Committee Chair, Gloucestershire



Did you hear the one about the king of the indoor lambing system who decided to start outdoor lambing at the age of 55?

That's me! And I certainly have a few more scars from my journey as a result. I think sometimes it's easier not to look back too much when things beyond our control are challenging. It's best to embrace the positives. But the figures will tell the true story.

I lambed the remainder of our Mules indoors in early March. They came in at Christmas, were shorn and fed right through to two weeks after lambing. The shed seemed a very quiet place compared to what it used to be with 800 sheep in it.

The fact I was lambing the Mules in March and the poor weather reduced my time to focus on getting the Exlanas into as many groups as I wanted probably put me on the back foot come April. A hundred maiden yearlings were always going to be challenging when you're not hardened to the whole outdoor lambing experience and they were certainly the group with the most issues. The four toothies held their nerve and kept me sane, but ravens and foxes made sure I had something to worry about. But there were massive savings on feed and labour costs.

All lambs have had their first clostridial vaccine and nematodirus treatment where required. Creep feeders are out with the Suffolk Mules and there is grass in front of the Exlanas.

I have learnt many lessons for next year to aid improvement and I have a long way to go to climb the ranks of outdoor lambing royalty, but I haven't been put off and I still have 13 years until I am allowed to retire. The journey continues.

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## NSA Ram Sales 2024

**NEW LOCATION NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale**  
Monday 5th August – Brecon Livestock Market

**NSA South West Ram Sale**  
Wednesday 14th August – Exeter Livestock Centre

**NSA Eastern Region Rugby Ram Sale\***  
Friday 30th August – Rugby Farmers Mart

**Thame Farmers Market breeding ewe sale incorporating the NSA South East Region Ram Sale\***  
Friday 6th September – Thame Farmers Market

**Melton Midlands Sheep Fair incorporating the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale\***  
Friday 20th September – Melton Mowbray Market

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



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For more details on sales, dates and catalogues for upcoming sales

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Sources: \*AbacusBio report 2022 \*\*AHDB British Sheep Breeds Survey 2020  
\*\*\*Texel Society Taste vs Waste trial 2019 \*\*\*\*Texel Society data 2024