

SHEEPFARMER

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A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

NEXT GENERATION AMBASSADORS

ROUND-UP OF THEIR BUSY YEAR

POLICY UPDATES

BUDGETS, ABATTOIRS AND LYNX

LIVER FLUKE

CONCERNS THIS WINTER




seasons greetings

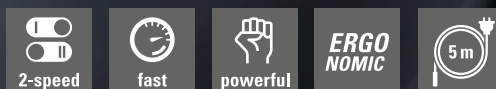
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In hope 2025 offers positive change

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



It's a well-known fact that no two farms are alike.

They can be clustered, upland and lowland, owner occupied or tenant, no land related borrowings or mortgaged, farms with staff and single operations. You can go on and on.

Diversity is great but to thrive within a common supply chain or common fiscal rules is a challenge. Over time, business structures adapt and learn to live with a set of rules and then significant and sudden change comes along and mayhem ensues.

The seven-year agricultural transition period in England was agreed specifically to allow farm businesses to adapt over time with no cliff edges and minimal casualties. This autumn has seen some exceptionally brutal changes undermining any planned transition, disruption of the status quo and shock waves sent through the fragile sense of confidence in the future.

Budget

While Defra has heralded the maintenance of the agricultural budget, its real value has been eroded due to inflationary costs – while the speeding up the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme has been unexpected, hitting some businesses hard. The increase in employers' National Insurance contributions may not affect many farms directly, but for food processors and retailers it will bring huge additional costs.

We all know retailers like to keep food inflation low so savings are often aimed at the easiest player in the supply chain – farmers. Reductions in Agricultural Property Relief likely mean many of those lucky enough to inherit the family farm, unless they have done their planning well in advance, will end up selling land to pay the tax, or borrowing and having to cover a finance charge.

Farming will survive – it always does – and change brings winners and losers, usually creating opportunities for some, but NSA doesn't want to see casualties, not at a business level and definitely not at a human level.

At the time of writing, we still don't know whether the government will yield to the growing voice of opposition to the Budget. While this was intended to be a budget for economic growth and to boost public services, such as the National Health Service, there is a risk it could result in business closure, job losses, inflation and higher levels of public borrowing.

The saving grace is people will always need feeding. Food security and self-sufficiency are finally being recognised and we are likely to see future global incidents that strengthen this realisation.

Appointment

Many readers will have seen I have been appointed as the Independent Chair of the Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG). This is a role independent of NSA and paid for by Defra. The establishment of this group was one of the key recommendations made by the Dartmoor Inquiry and its aim is to work with stakeholders and interested groups on Dartmoor to agree a land use framework and implement 25 practical recommendations made in the inquiry.

My appointment has not been universally welcomed, but those who have taken the time to speak or contact me have been unanimous in their support and recognition of the strategic importance of this role.

I have no doubt it will bring its challenges, but the opportunities it offers to put in place a balanced approach to one of our more fragile upland regions in England, establishing a framework addressing our climate, natural resource, nature, food and access needs are of paramount importance. If we can get it to work, then it's a model that could be of interest in other contested landscapes.

Enjoy this December edition of *Sheep Farmer*. I hope it allows you escape into the more enjoyable and rewarding aspects of sheep farming. Christmas and the New Year couldn't be a better time to do this and I wish you all an enjoyable and peaceful festive period.



National Sheep Association

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

/natsheep @natsheep @nationalsheep

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NSA staff

Contact via NSA Head Office or email directly

Phil Stocker NSA Chief Executive
ceo@nationalsheep.org.uk

Alexandra Abbott Assistant Bookkeeper
accounts@nationalsheep.org.uk

Chris Adamson Membership Development Officer
chris@nationalsheep.org.uk

Joanne Briggs Operations Director
joanne@nationalsheep.org.uk

Andrea Calvesbert Assistant to the Chief Executive
andrea@nationalsheep.org.uk

Katie James Communications Manager
katie@nationalsheep.org.uk

Nicola Noble Project Manager
inc. Sheep Farmer editorial
nicola@nationalsheep.org.uk

Emma Owen Policy Manager
emma@nationalsheep.org.uk

Fiona Parker NSA Support & Activities Officer
fiona@nationalsheep.org.uk

Ellie Pincombe Digital Communications Officer
ellie@nationalsheep.org.uk

Helen Roberts Corporate Sales Manager
inc. Sheep Farmer advertising
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Diana Smith Membership Officer
membership@nationalsheep.org.uk

Karen Sumner Finance Officer
karens@nationalsheep.org.uk



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NSA regions look forward to welcoming members to ARMMs

It's a busy few months ahead with all NSA regions holding their annual members' meetings early in 2024. All meetings are open to members and non-members, although only members can vote. Many of the meetings will include interesting speakers from the sector sharing useful information.

- Eastern:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Eastern Region will be held on Tuesday 14th January, 6pm at the Heath Court Hotel (Best Western), Moulton Road, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 8DY.
- Marches:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Marches Region will be held on Thursday 23rd January, 7pm at Worcester Livestock Market, Nunnery Way, Worcester, WR4 0SQ.
- Wales:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be held on Thursday 4th February, 11.30am in the International Pavilion, Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3WY.
- Northern:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Region will be held on Thursday 6th February, 7.30pm start with food from 7pm at Penrith & District Farmers Auction Mart, Agricultural Hall, Penrith, CA11 0DN.
- South East:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA South East Region will be held on Monday 10th February, 6.30pm at The Angel Hotel, Privett, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3NN.
- Northern Ireland:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Ireland Region will be held on Tuesday 11th February, 7.30pm at The Meadows Equestrian Centre, Enbankment, Lurgan, Co Armagh, BT66 6FD.
- Central:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Central Region will be held on Tuesday 11th February, 7pm at The Agricultural Business Centre (Bakewell Market), Agricultural Way, DE45 1AH.
- South West:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA South West Region will be held on Tuesday 18th February, 7.30pm at the Stockman's Restaurant, Exeter Livestock Centre, Matford Business Park, Exeter, EX2 8FD.
- Scotland:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Members' Meeting for NSA Scottish Region will be held on Wednesday 19th February, 10.30am at SRUC, Roslin Institute, Easter Bush Campus, EH25 9RG.



Tribute to sheep industry stalwart

Highly respected and much missed sheep industry stalwart, Charles Sercombe, was honoured at Sheep Breeders Round Table as his family received the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution in his honour.

NSA was privileged the Sheep Breeders' Round Table offered to host the award presentation, given Charles chaired the event organising committee until his passing – alongside many other industry and governmental roles. The award was presented to Helen Sercombe, Charles' wife, and his daughters, Victoria and Grace, at the evening dinner.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "There could be no more deserving recipient of the 2024 NSA George Hedley Award than Charles. It is impossible to measure the positive impact he has had on our industry. He will be remembered as a progressive and highly ethical agent of change for UK sheep farming."

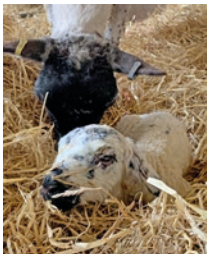


Last chance to win

It's not long now until one lucky winner will be announced of the NSA prize giveaway for 2024. Entries will close on Tuesday 31st December so to be in with a chance of winning the Nugent L3618H 12ft livestock trailer with sheep decks, worth more than £9,500, generously provided by Nugent Engineering, make sure you visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw before the end of the year. Good luck!

Still time to place NSA Lambing List advert

A reminder the NSA Lambing List is live and open for members to advertise for lambing help this coming season. Find more information at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list.



NSA shares its sympathies to the family

We were saddened to hear of the recent passing of David Rossiter, an active NSA member who held many officeholder roles over the years and was the current NSA South West Ram Sale Treasurer. While the industry has lost a passionate sheep breeder, it is heartening to see the next generation, David's son Richard, following in his father's footsteps. See pages 22-23 for Rich's farm feature.

Moredun christmas cards and desk calendar

Add some extra sparkle to your Christmas with flock in the field Christmas cards. There's also a new 2025 desk calendar by Thomas Joseph available. Buy now at www.moredun.org.uk/shop.



A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

NSA Chief Executive to lead Dartmoor Land Use Management Group

In late October Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, was announced as the first independent Chair of the new Dartmoor Land Use Management Group (DLUMG), following appointment by Minister Daniel Zeichner. Mr Stocker, responsible in this role to the Secretary of State, will lead the group, created because of the independent Dartmoor Inquiry regarding land management last year. DLUMG is charged with developing and delivering a land use framework and plan for Dartmoor, while also providing oversight and stewarding the delivery of 25 recommendations put forward in the review.

This role is independent of Mr Stocker's work at NSA but aligns with the association's future vision, as laid out in the recent NSA report 'UK Sheep farming and the Sustainability Agenda'.



Delinked payment reductions accelerate

The autumn Budget this year introduces a significant acceleration in the reduction of delinked payments for UK agriculture.

This follows a trend towards simplifying subsidy systems and encouraging greater environmental stewardship. The delinked payments, which are designed to provide financial support to farmers irrespective of their specific agricultural production, are being gradually reduced to align more with environmental goals and sustainability. For 2025, the government plans a 76% reduction on the first £30,000 of a payment, while any amount above £30,000 will be cut completely.

Labour's Budget and the devolved nations

The recent Budget has significant implications for agriculture, especially for the devolved governments.

The overall agricultural funding remains intact and the Budget has allocated resources for critical areas, including productivity, flood defence and tax adjustments to support farmers facing high costs and climate-related challenges.

For devolved governments funding will be integrated into the general block grants for each region, calculated using the Barnett formula, meaning agriculture now competes with other regional priorities like health and education. This shift raises concerns about reduced stability for agricultural support, as allocations could vary year by year based on competing needs within each nation.

For Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, securing adequate funding will require close coordination to maintain support levels needed for both productivity and environmental goals. Key areas such as flood management and environmentally focused farming received boosts, but overall agricultural funding still falls short for long-term resilience. More on page 10.



Efforts are underway to address lack of export facilities in EU ports.

Border Control Posts for exporting live animals

Progress continues slowly in re-establishing export routes for British breeding animals to the EU, particularly the development of Border Control Posts (BCPs).

Since Brexit, the lack of approved BCPs at key EU ports has prevented the export of live breeding animals, including pigs and sheep, from the UK. This is a major setback for breeders. The existing equine BCP at Hook of Holland in the Netherlands is undergoing modifications to gain approval for handling additional livestock species, such as breeding pigs, with the aim to resume exports in 2025.

This shift represents one of the first actionable BCP adjustments for live animal exports, but progress remains limited in other critical EU locations, such as Calais, France, where no suitable BCP currently exists.

NSA will continue to stress the importance of regaining live exports of breeding animals to the EU.

Updates on bluetongue

As of October 2024, bluetongue virus (BTV-3) cases were on the rise across the UK with recent cases identified in Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex.

As of mid-October, nearly 50 premises had reported positive cases of bluetongue in sheep, cattle and even deer. Movement restrictions are in place in affected regions, creating restricted zones and temporary control zones regulating the movement of livestock to prevent further spread.

In response to the outbreak, Defra has approved the emergency use of BTV-3 vaccines. Vaccination is voluntary, prioritised for high-risk counties like Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. Vaccinated livestock still remain under movement restrictions within these zones to control transmission risk.

Members are encouraged to work closely with their vet to monitor their animals and ensure compliance with relevant biosecurity measures.



NSA Regions

**Central**Chair: **Matt Bagley**Manager: **Lizzy Wells**07895 111089
central@nationalsheep.org.uk**Cymru/Wales**Chair: **Caryl Hughes**Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**01691 654712 / 07976 803066
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk**Eastern**Chair: **Robert Spink**Manager: **Nerys Wright**07891 187643
eastern@nationalsheep.org.uk**Marches**Chair: **Richard Vines**Manager: **Katie James**07748 151235
marches@nationalsheep.org.uk**Northern**Chair: **Ted Ogden**Manager: **Chris Adamson**07930 225150
chris@nationalsheep.org.uk**Northern Ireland**Chair: **Alistair Armstrong**Development Officer: **Ellen Moorehead**07513 069435
ni@nationalsheep.org.uk**Scotland**Chair: **Peter Myles**Regional Coordinator: **Grace Reid**07787 142858
grace@nationalsheep.org.uk**South East**Chair: **Susie Parish**Manager: **Sarah Blake**07734 428712
southeast@nationalsheep.org.uk**South West**Chair: **Rich Rossiter**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
sue@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 Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

NSA Northern Region recently held an evening talk titled 'Anthelmintic resistance, keeping your stock healthy'.

Looking at managing parasite resistance to safeguard livestock health and farm productivity, topic experts Roxanne Winstanley, Elanco, and Ben Strugnell, Farm Post Mortems, shared insights on testing for worm burdens, effective drug rotation and post-mortem analysis.

The region has set a date for its Annual Members' Meeting – full details on page 2. Preparations are also well underway for NSA North Sheep 2025 on Wednesday 4th June at Greystoke Castle Farm, Penrith. More in 2025 editions of *Sheep Farmer* magazine.



NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

With the wet autumn having thwarted attempts at a farm walk NSA Marches Region will welcome attendees to a meeting organised in response to the planned changes to inheritance tax relief.

Taking place on Thursday 5th December – just as *Sheep Farmer* magazine arrives with members – at the Longhorn Restaurant & Grill, Tewkesbury, starting at 12.30pm. The meeting will welcome industry speakers to share advice on implications of the proposed tax and what might be needed in terms of succession planning. A discussion on applicable support options will also take place.

In the new year the region will be holding its Annual Members' Meeting on Thursday 23rd January at 7pm. *More on page 2 with speakers announced soon.*

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

NSA Scottish Region celebrated another successful Lamb for St Andrew's Day Dinner at Hetland Hall Hotel Carrutherstown, Dumfries and Galloway, in November.

After dinner entertainment from Ken and Fiona Fletcher followed a fantastic meal celebrating Scotch Lamb. Thanks to QMS for the lamb, Shearwell Data for the wine and many others who donated prizes. All funds raised will be donated to the Lamb for St Andrew's Day campaign, focused on getting school children cooking and eating Scotch Lamb.

The regional committee looks forward to seeing members at the Annual Members' Meeting on Wednesday 19th February 2025. Registration essential through me. *More on page 2.*

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

The region is looking forward to its Annual Members' Meeting on Tuesday 18th February 2025, with full details on page 2.

We are also in the process of organising a meeting with Defra in the first few weeks of the new year to discuss the latest developments under the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and Animal Health & Welfare Pathway review. Please keep an eye on the NSA Weekly Email Update for further information.

I've also assisted the penning of a new book *Exmoor Farms: A Year on the Moor*, by the Exmoor Hill Farming Network. *More on page 42.*



NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Ellen Moorehead, Regional Coordinator

NSA Northern Ireland Region recently hosted a successful industry-wide meeting to discuss maedi visna (MV).

The meeting allowed attendees to discuss the challenges, implications and proposed changes to MV status in NI. The level of engagement highlighted the importance of industry-wide collaboration on this significant issue.

The region will continue supporting local conversations by attending breed society meetings, to connect directly with farming communities and address specific concerns unique to each breed and locality. If any groups want an NSA Northern Ireland representative for upcoming meetings, please reach out.

The NSA Northern Ireland Annual Regional Members' Meeting has been set for Tuesday 11th February 2025. *See page 2 for details.*

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

The region's had a busy autumn joining a range of events, all with inspirational speakers.

This was capped off with Welsh Winter Fair where NSA Cymru/Wales Region sponsored the young handlers and YFC trimming competitions – and was pleased to see Tracy Powell win the John Gittens Award for her contribution to the Welsh sheep sector.

This event was followed by a regional meeting hosting speakers from MSD and Hazel Wright, Welsh Veterinary Science Centre, updating members on Enferplex testing. More on page 40.

The region will hold its Annual Regional Members' Meeting on Tuesday 4th February with afternoon speakers including Richard Irvine Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales and HCC. Full details on page 2.



NSA Central Region

by Lizzy Wells, Manager

Thank you to everyone who attended and supported the NSA Central Region Field Day in October – full report on page 6.

As the new year approaches, we now look forward to the NSA Central Region Annual Members' Meeting in its usual location courtesy of Bagshaws on Tuesday 11th February – start time and further details on page 2.

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NSA Eastern Region

By Nerys Wright, Manager

The weather was on our side in October giving the region a dry day for the NSA Eastern Region farm walk courtesy of Tim Pratt and all at Wantisden Hall Farm, Suffolk.

Seeing young lambs at foot – as the farm has a Poll Dorset flock – was a little disorientating for those of us only recently putting the tups in. We witnessed an impressive business in operation, from potato and onion production through to the anaerobic digestion plant.

Bluetongue restrictions are easing and we are hoping for a cold snap to trigger the seasonally vector low period when midge activity is reduced. This could lead to a relaxation of the current disease control measures.

The region's Annual Members' Meeting will be moving into the new year for the first time in 2025. *Details on page 2.*

NSA South East Region

Sarah Blake, Manager

November's NSA South East Region Field Days were held with great success in November attracting a good number of NSA members and others, including a group of engaged and interested students.

All enjoyed the mix of presentations and workshops. Thanks to all involved. Full event report on page 6.

NSA South East Region now looks forward to its Annual Members' Meeting held in its usual location on Monday 10th February. Details on page 2 with speakers confirmed shortly.

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Field days share benefits of cover crop grazing across the NSA regions

Following the success of NSA South East Region's inaugural Field Days in 2022, this effective format of presentations and interactive demonstrations and workshops returned in two regions this autumn.

With a focus on the use of forage/cover crops for sheep, more than 60 people were welcomed by NSA Central Region to its first ever Field Day at the end of October at the University of Lincoln's Riseholme Park Campus.

Timely update

With the location being in a bluetongue restricted zone the day opened with a useful and timely update on the current disease situation from Sascha van Helvoort of APHA. Following this, attendees were split into four smaller groups to allow for greater discussion and rotated around the informative workshop areas.

Topics covered included a demonstration on the benefits of bolusing, preventative health care for flocks, soil nutrition and the importance of soil sampling, looking at grazing options and the benefits of herbal leys, along with an update on the current available Sustainable Farming Incentive options and how to apply for them.

After a delicious lunch of lamb burgers courtesy of Gelston Lamb, the day finished with a fascinating tour of Riseholme Park Farm, encompassing its prize-winning herd of Lincoln Red cattle along with hearing about the breeding programmes and the value of data recording across the farm's multiple sheep flocks.



NSA Central Region's inaugural Field Day was very popular.

NSA Central Region would like to thank its main sponsor Origin Fertilisers and other sponsors: Agrimin, British Wool, GFP Agriculture, MSD Animal Health, Phillips Animal Health, Promar International and Shearwell Data.

Ideal location

NSA South East Region held the first of its two Field Days this year at the start of November (with the second taking place as *Sheep Farmer* magazine went to press). Held at the ideal location of Hyde Farm near Maidenhead, Berkshire, the Randall Farms operation demonstrated the clear benefits to both arable and sheep farmer of incorporating cover crops

into arable rotations, a practice undertaken for several years with success on farm.

The event drew a good crowd looking to learn more about grazed forage in sheep systems with interesting presentations on cover crop choices from Kings Seeds and general farm finance advice from event sponsor Virgin Money.

Following a much-needed warming lunch attendees enjoyed the afternoon workshop round robin where they had chance to join sessions on a range of topics from strategic parasite control to fodder crop grazing.

Thank you to all NSA South East Region Field Day sponsors: British Wool, Bimeda, Elanco, MSD Animal Health, Rappa and Virgin Money.

Join us at an NSA event in 2025



NSA Welsh Sheep Wednesday 21st May 2025

Tregoe Farm, Brecon. By kind permission of the Penny Chantler and sons.

NSA North Sheep Wednesday 4th June 2025

Greystoke Castle Farm, Penrith, Cumbria. By kind permission of the Peile family.

NSA Highland Sheep Wednesday 11th June 2025

Midfearn Farm, Ardgay, Sutherland. By kind permission of Mr & Mrs C. W. Brooke.

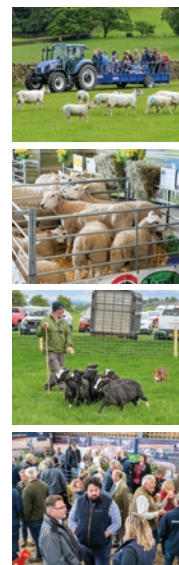
NSA Sheep South West Wednesday 25th June 2025

Weston Farm, East Knowstone, South Molton, Devon.
By kind permission of the Stanbury family.

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland Tuesday 1st July 2025

22 Gortnagross Road, Dungiven, County Londonderry.
By kind permission of the McFarlane family.

NSA is also planning interactive and engaging regional events such as Field Days, farm walks and more for 2025 – check *Sheep Farmer* magazine, the NSA website and other NSA communications for further updates.



Attendees enjoyed practical workshops at the NSA South East Region Field Day.

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Diverse sheep farming backgrounds enable region to represent all views

By Ellen Moorehead, NSA

In this *Sheep Farmer* feature profiling the nine NSA regions, this edition looks at the NSA Northern Ireland (NI) Region Committee, one of three committees within the association that provides a voice for sheep farmers in a devolved nation.

From the glens of County Antrim to the loughs of County Fermanagh and mountains of Mourne, this committee represents a broad range of landscapes and farming systems. This includes everything from lowland grass-based farms to the more traditional heather hill farming systems.

Represented voices

The committee itself is made up of members from all corners of NI, ensuring all farming systems and voices are represented. This regional diversity allows the committee to work effectively on behalf of all types of sheep farmers, helping to address both local challenges and shared industry issues.

NSA NI Region hosts NSA Sheep NI on a biennial basis, an event that has recently evolved to take place on-farm, allowing for an immersive, hands-on experience for attendees. Additionally, the committee organises several industry meetings focused on key topics affecting the sector, creating opportunities for knowledge sharing and industry collaboration.

Jayne Harkness Bones Committee member

From Brexit to environmental policies, to the pandemic and wool prices, the resilience of our UK sheep farmers has undoubtedly been armoured by the work of the NSA. Within a few short months of being elected to the Northern Ireland Committee, I found myself sitting across the table from our Minister of Agriculture in a meeting to support the voice that NSA is committed to using to promote our industry.

I wasn't sure how to approach the subject of wool in this meeting but being born and bred into the industry, as my father was a contract shearer, I quickly found my flow. I'm not sure how much of an impression I left, but I look forward to future developments.

Fact file

- Seventh generation sheep farmer from County Antrim who came home to farm after a career as a practicing psychotherapist.
- Passionate about the promotion of wool's sustainable credentials.



William Egerton Committee member

I farm alongside my father and two brothers on the family farm. The farm consists of four enterprises; sheep, suckler cow to beef, dairy calf to beef and calf rearing.

My sheep enterprise consists of 250 New Zealand Suffolk cross Lleyen breeding ewes lambing indoors in March/April. We are focused on breeding good quality replacements.

In the past four years I have also been a technology demonstration farm for sheep grassland management and part of a sheep business development group hosting several farm walks a year showcasing what I am doing.

I have completed the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme this year and found this to be very beneficial for my personal development, as well as making some great friends. I am now starting to get more involved with NSA, joining the NSA NI Regional Committee within the last year, and I look forward to being able to progress within the association.

Fact file

- NSA Next Generation Ambassador this year.
- Manages a progressive flock embracing data and technology.



Alastair Armstrong Regional Chair

I farm along with my father Sinclair on a family farm in Tempo, County Fermanagh, running 150 Park-type North Country Cheviots, 100 Hill-type North Country Cheviots and 30 South Country Cheviots. The majority are run with pedigree breeding rams for pedigree and commercial use.

Cast ewes are sold privately with a select group sold at our in-lamb sale every February. We sell stock throughout the UK and Ireland and have recently exported to Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The flock is high health being maedi visna accredited, scrapie monitored and performance recorded. I also shepherd for Aughtintaine Estate in Fivemiletown, County Tyrone, comprising of 1,200-acre (485ha) heather hill and 50 acres (20ha) of green fields.

I first got involved with NSA in 2017 when I joined the Northern Ireland Region Committee and I'm in my third year as Chair. I'm also involved in Ulster Farmers Union where I'm Hill Farming Committee Chair and part of the Sheep Taskforce and AgriSearch Sheep Committee. I believe we should be making our voices heard as farmers.

Fact file

- Active committee member across several NI farming organisations.
- The family has bred Cheviot sheep since the 1970s.



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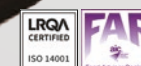
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Danielle Goatley 07710 075824

Georgina Chapman 07485 192774
Nutritionist | Technical Support Manager

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Has Labour just stumbled or fallen flat with its first farming proposal?

By Emma Owen, NSA

Following months of assurances in the run up to the election they were on the side of our food producers and in support of farming – it seems Labour's first decision has fallen short of its promises.

The recent Budget introduces new policies aimed at supporting the agricultural sector through financial investments, environmental initiatives, and changes to tax and inheritance reliefs. But its long-term impacts on agricultural productivity, rural land use and farming resilience are complex and multi-faceted.

One of the main highlights is the substantial funding package for agriculture, including a record £427m in grants to boost productivity and sustainability in farming. This initiative encourages private sector investment and aims to drive innovation in agricultural practices, reinforcing food security and self-sufficiency across the UK. Although welcomed, amid inflation and rising costs this package is seen by some as a budget cut.

Proactive investment

Additionally, a new £75m allocation for water and flood management aims to protect farmland against extreme weather events, which are increasingly frequent due to climate change. This proactive investment in infrastructure is expected to help safeguard valuable agricultural land in vulnerable areas, ensuring its long-term viability.

In terms of tax reforms, the extension of Agricultural Property Relief (APR) to land enrolled in government environmental schemes from April 2025 reflects a broader trend towards incentivising sustainable land use. This policy encourages landowners to adopt environmentally friendly practices, aligning agricultural incentives with climate goals. But the change could shift some farmland out of traditional agricultural

production, potentially affecting the availability of productive land over time, with more land redirected towards environmental stewardship and biodiversity projects.

The Budget's shift towards environmental schemes and its funding for innovation have the potential to drive the UK's agricultural industry toward sustainability. However, NSA has highlighted these changes also bring uncertainty regarding land use priorities and the costs associated with transitioning to greener practices. Balancing productivity with environmental commitments is crucial to ensure the sector remains competitive while aligning with the UK's climate objectives.



NSA highlights the lack of support for younger farmers in the Budget.

The changes to APR and inheritance tax are expected to significantly impact farming businesses, especially family-owned farms that are often asset-rich but cash-poor. Under the new provisions, full inheritance tax relief will only apply to the first £1m of agricultural and business assets; any value above this threshold will receive a reduced relief rate of 50% starting from April 2026.

This adjustment means many family farms, especially those valued above £1m, will now face inheritance tax bills upon succession, which could

require the sale of portions of the farm to cover costs, putting multigenerational family farms at risk and fragmenting rural communities.

The farming sector relies heavily on APR to facilitate generational transfers of land without incurring prohibitive tax burdens. NSA has expressed concerns the new cap could dissuade long-term land stewardship and add financial stress to families passing down farms. This particularly challenges small to mid-sized farms where land values often surpass £1m, pushing these families to sell or subdivide their holdings.

Adverse impacts

There are also potential adverse impacts on rural economies, community stability and local food production. This shift could reduce the availability of farmland for tenant farmers, thus impacting agricultural productivity and rural employment long term.

These changes introduce uncertainty into the planning of family farming businesses, creating an environment where only well-capitalised entities are able to sustain the tax burden over successive generations, potentially paving the way for larger corporations to consolidate land ownership in the agricultural sector.

NSA continues to recommend policy adjustments to counteract these challenges, making APR or environmental scheme benefits more accessible to young or new farmers. Land grants, subsidies, or low-interest loans targeted at young farmers might help balance access to land. NSA continues to support industry and emphasise UK food production must be supported, not burdened by regulation and tax.

In summary, while the Budget aims to modernise and diversify UK agriculture, its current structure may favour corporate interests in land acquisition over next-generation access. Addressing this disparity will likely require a rethink from the government and specific support for young farmers.

Sheep Farmer magazine



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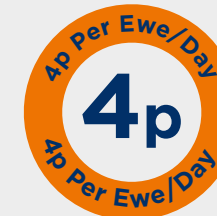
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The decline of small abattoirs, future risks and potential solutions

By Emma Owen, NSA

It's no secret our small abattoir network has seen significant decline with numbers dropping from more than 2,500 in the 1970s to just over 200 today.

This reduction poses challenges for local food systems, especially those supporting sustainable farming and native livestock breeds. Small abattoirs are essential for processing diverse and smaller-scale livestock operations, ensuring rural farmers can access nearby slaughter facilities without resorting to large, industrial-scale options. These small businesses often cater to farmers focused on high animal welfare and niche products.

Under the last administration the Small Abattoir Fund was announced running from December 2023 to September 2024 aiming to support those small and medium sized businesses in decline. Although the funding was welcomed at the time, was it a case of too little too late?

Further challenges

The small abattoir network now faces further challenges from proposed changes to Food Standards Agency (FSA) charges. Currently, abattoirs benefit from a discounted charging structure based on the number of hours involved in official controls, including vet and meat hygiene inspectors. Smaller abattoirs, which process fewer animals and require fewer regulatory

hours, receive greater discounts making it more affordable for compliance with regulations. This discount system is crucial for their survival as it helps manage costs and allows continued operating within tight margins.

While the intention is to ensure government support provides value for money and continues to meet consumer expectations for food safety and animal welfare, NSA says removing or reducing these discounts could be devastating. If small abattoirs had to deal with additional charges, it would decimate the remaining network, which is already fragile after years of decline.

Evidence from the Abattoir Sector Group indicated low throughput abattoirs – those under 1,000 livestock units – do not have a full time vet so the majority of their hours will be covered by a 90% discount. Once the throughput has exceeded 1,000 livestock units the abattoir is required to have a full time vet so their costs increase considerably. These hours may still be eligible for discount in either the 75% or 26% discount range.



Survival of small abattoirs is crucial to our industry, says NSA.

NSA has urged FSA to seek ways to reduce the financial burdens through efficiency measures and proportionate controls, as well as maintain the discount to support these vital businesses. The FSA has acknowledged the challenges but has pointed out rising costs, particularly related to hiring vets due to a global shortage, make it necessary to review the charging structure. But this must not come at the cost of small abattoirs or put businesses in jeopardy.

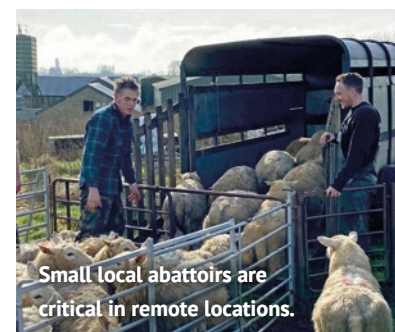
Historical roots

The decline of small abattoirs in the UK has deep historical roots and significant implications for rural businesses, farmers and consumers alike. It began in the mid-20th century with shifts in regulatory practices changing consumer habits and the rise of supermarket chains.

The introduction of strict EU hygiene regulations in the 1990s, particularly following food safety concerns like the BSE crisis, imposed high compliance costs on abattoirs. Small abattoirs, which lacked the financial resources of larger facilities, struggled to keep up with required upgrades, additional inspections and safety protocols. The consolidation of food safety standards meant a move toward larger, more centralised abattoirs that could manage compliance costs more effectively.

Operating a small abattoir is inherently costly due to low throughput, limited economies of scale and higher labour costs relative to output. Competition from large, industrial-scale abattoirs made it difficult for small abattoirs to remain viable. Rising costs of utilities, waste disposal and insurance also placed extra burdens on smaller operators that could not spread these costs over a high volume of animals.

In recent decades, consumers increasingly shifted toward supermarkets, drawn by convenience and lower prices. Supermarkets tend to source meat from large-scale suppliers to streamline logistics and lower costs, leading to decreased demand for locally slaughtered meat.



Small local abattoirs are critical in remote locations.



Mobile abattoirs could offer one solution.

Infrastructure

Rural infrastructure, including transport links and waste processing facilities, often favours larger operations in urban or semi-urban areas, where transport networks are better developed. Small abattoirs in remote locations face

logistical challenges in processing and transporting livestock, adding costs and operational complexities and deterring investment.

The push for sustainable food systems and ethical meat production has led to a renewed interest in supporting small abattoirs with some initiatives focusing on grants, subsidies or flexible regulation to help them thrive. Investment in mobile abattoirs has also been suggested as a potential solution allowing processing to happen on farms, reducing the need for animal transport and meeting the needs of small-scale producers and rural communities.

The decline of small abattoirs in the UK serves as a reminder of the complex interaction between regulation, economics and rural community sustainability. To support rural economies and align with modern values around sustainability and animal welfare, revitalising or reinventing small abattoirs could be a key factor in shaping a resilient and ethical UK meat industry.

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Understanding lynx management by learning from others

By Grace Reid, NSA Scottish Region Coordinator

Highlights from a study tour to the Jura region in Switzerland have raised further concerns for lynx reintroduction to the UK.

Earlier this year I joined 12 stakeholders with backgrounds in farming, hunting and forestry to learn from Switzerland in its management of the Eurasian lynx reintroduction and the implications for similar work in the UK.

The first reintroduction to Central and Western Europe occurred in Switzerland in the early 1970s. Over the past 50 years, the Swiss model has demonstrated there should have been a proper public consultation process combined with a recognition of how highly adaptable lynx could become and a public database of livestock losses to ensure transparency and trust building.

Sheep predation

The lynx is a highly territorial ambush predator killing small to medium sized animals. After Norway, Switzerland has suffered the highest rates of sheep predation by lynx in Europe. In the late 1990s, there was an increase in lynx density coupled with a decline in roe deer populations and an increase in attacks on livestock. But influences such as changing winter weather and pressure from hunters also had a detrimental impact.

This increase in livestock attacks led to formalised support for the prevention of losses, compensation for damages and a policy for the removal of problem lynx some 30 years after initial release. Lynx predation on sheep continues today but is overshadowed by the return of the wolf.

Swiss policy has been to manage the impact of lynx rather than limiting numbers. Provisions

exist for the removal of problem animals, but a conflict threshold must be exceeded and further strict criteria must be met before action is taken.

In Switzerland, the most vulnerable are livestock grazing pastures surrounded by forests and/or scattered with shrubs, in areas where abundant wild prey attract lynx. In these hotspots, the removal of individual lynx causing damage is unlikely to be successful and only flock protection measures offer a long-term solution.

Guardian dogs and high electric fences were seen to be the most popular measures used, but other options included protective collars, flashlights and alpacas or llamas. In the growing presence of wolves, more Swiss farmers are using dogs to protect their livestock.

Compensation is only paid when a lynx is confirmed as the responsible predator, requiring carcass recovery as evidence. Payments are scaled to reflect the value of livestock lost and independently judged. Compensation may be available if livestock must be moved in response to a lynx and conservation payments are available to fund preventative measures.

Despite learnings from Europe, there remains a gap in understanding in terms of the practicalities of implementation and uncertainty of impact should lynx reintroduction take place in Scotland. The Swiss model clearly shows a time lag in the period of learning from the initial release to implementation and adaptation of control methods, mitigation, compensation and legislative framework.

Varied attitudes

I found attitudes towards lynx to be varied. Younger farmers haven't known farming without lynx whereas older farmers are conflicted with lynx presence, having to learn to live alongside the adaptable predator and manage its impact with considerable effort and losses.

Scotland continues to endure the devastating impacts and failings of a reintroduced species – the white tailed eagle – mainly on the west coast but with a geographical spread widening at an increasing rate. The decline of farming due to a compulsion effect is already in sharp focus



A sheep farm near Soubrey, Switzerland, where lynx are present.

because of recent policy, weather, workforce and global political changes.

Concerns from the Scottish sheep industry have arisen on many levels in relation to lynx, not only in terms of predation but also communication, responsibility, agreed outcomes and ulterior motives. It can ill-afford to have another apex predator reintroduced without a management strategy, fully funded compensation, mitigation packages and agreements in place before release.

NSA is aware of projects reopening the discussion on reintroducing lynx. Currently the Lynx to Scotland project is looking at the Cairngorms area and the Missing Lynx project is focusing on Kielder Forest, Northumberland. It's vital the sector is supported, listened to, reassured and valued.

NSA is holding two meetings each side of the Scottish/English border to engage with you and inform our response to any formal consultation. The meetings will also provide an opportunity to listen to Nuffield Scholar Dr Jonny Hanson who studied large carnivore reintroductions to Britain and Ireland. Dr Hanson will present his report via Teams and is happy to take questions. To register to attend the meetings and/or request a copy of the report, please contact Emma Owen on policy@nationalsheep.org.uk.

NSA lynx meetings

- **Wednesday 22nd January 2025. 4-6pm.**
Tynedale Function Suite, Tyne Green, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3SG.
- **Thursday 23rd January 2025. 4-6pm.**
Salmon Room, Buccleuch Arms, The Green, St Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0EW.



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UK Budget has knock-on effects for Scotland with concerns over adequate funding

By the time this magazine hits your doorsteps, the increasingly anticipated 2025/26 Budget will be presented to Scottish Parliament.

Undoubtedly decisions made by the UK Government in October will impact on food production and agricultural business viability for years to come.

Scotland has been put in the position of receiving a block grant, which has increased by 8%. But this has come with no commitment to a ring-fenced multi-annual contribution towards agriculture.

Promise

We need Scottish Government to deliver what the UK Government would not. Scottish agriculture needs a promise to the previously rolled over £620m funding – plus more given the increase to the block grant – in addition to

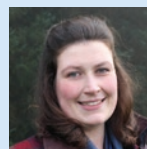
returning the outstanding £46m of uncommitted funds to the 2025/26 Budget.



Given the nature of farming and crofting, multi-annual funding within successive Scottish budgets is a necessity to ensure the delivery of high-quality sustainable and quality food production, complemented by tackling climate change and enhancing biodiversity while underpinning vibrant rural communities.

Despite farming and crofting being tasked to

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



deliver ever more in terms of high-quality food production, help achieve climate change targets, deliver for nature and support the rural community, their very existence could be wiped out in short number of generations due to inheritance tax changes.

Support

NSA Scottish Region Committee met in late November to discuss the impacts of all of the above in addition to formulating a response to the ever-changing political situation in Scotland (and UK) and how to best support the sheep industry going forward.

In another policy area, NSA Scottish Region was pleased QMS gave Cattle and Sheep Scheme members the opportunity to give feedback on proposed changes earlier this autumn. It is expected the newly reduced scheme standards will become live early in June 2025 with anticipation they should be more straight forward and less time intensive.

Changes to the annual inventory submission date are active

There are important changes ahead to the way the annual inventory is run in Wales.

To bring the Welsh annual inventory in line with other UK nations, the date of the inventory will now be 1st December, but the information required will remain the same.

I would encourage you to utilise EID Cymru/Wales for future submissions and any members who don't have an account to register for one. Contact EID Cymru/Wales if there are any concerns.

Implications

NSA Cymru/Wales Region reminds members to be mindful of the potential implications of moving sheep to winter tack. Moves from outside a bluetongue restriction zone into a restriction

zone could have long term impacts on animal health. It may also mean pre-movement testing must take place in England before the return journey if restrictions are still in place, as well as post movement testing before movement restrictions are lifted on the receiving farm.

Restrictions

Be mindful of movement restrictions in place, meaning there are to be no moves of live animals into Wales from a restricted zone, which could restrict return journeys from tack. As things stand, NSA appreciates the potential difficulties created and continues to work with APHA, Defra and vets to ensure we find a solution securing animal health. Familiarise yourselves with the gov.uk advice and additional movement licence requirements through the NSA bluetongue page.

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region is encouraging members to respond to Natural Resources Wales' National Park in North East Wales consultation. There is a lot of opposition to the proposal especially as the size of the proposed area has been extended beyond the designated area of outstanding natural beauty.

Restriction zones outside Wales may impact animals on tack.



Northern Ireland's maedi visna (MV) free status under threat

By Ellen Moorehead, Regional Development Officer



The Northern Ireland sheep industry faces a significant threat as Daera proposes to revoke funding for the region's maedi visna (MV) free status.

This decision has sparked outrage among farmers, with over 100 attending an industry meeting in October to voice their concerns.

NSA NI Region has been at the forefront of the fight to retain MV-free status, meeting with both Minister Muir and Daera to highlight the detrimental impact this decision could have on the industry.

Devastation

Losing our MV-free status would be a devastating blow. Not only would it damage our reputation for producing high-quality sheep, but it would also lead to increased costs for farmers and restrict trade opportunities.

While pedigree flocks are particularly vulnerable to the economic impact of MV, due to the disease's potential to damage bloodlines and reduce the value of breeding stock, commercial flocks are also at risk.

- Even without obvious symptoms, infected ewes may produce less milk, resulting in slower-growing lambs.
- As the disease progresses, affected sheep become unproductive and may require premature culling, leading to significant financial losses.
- Losing MV-free status could result in trade restrictions, limiting access to valuable export markets and reducing the overall value of NI sheep.

NSA NI Region remains committed to working with Daera to find a solution that protects the Northern Ireland sheep industry. A key step in this process is the upcoming hearing with

the AERA Committee, where NSA and Ulster Farmers Union will present the case and urge the committee to reconsider the proposed funding cuts.

I'm hopeful Daera will recognise the importance of maintaining our MV-free status. This is not just about protecting our industry today, but safeguarding its future for generations.

Loss of the MV free scheme will have negative consequences in NI.



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Ambassadors take away advice and friendships from year with NSA



Having completed their series of informative delivery sessions for 2024, this year's group of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors have taken time to reflect upon their year of personal and career development. Here they share what is now keeping them busy and what they have taken from the programme.

William Roobottom Staffordshire



What a year it has been – 12 exciting and informative days across the UK seeing all different aspects of the sheep sector. This experience has been one to remember with so much to take back and build on at home.

There have been three huge takeaways for me. One, paddock grazing. Having not really seen this before it has already changed our business at home. A great talk from Liz Genever, independent consultant, really showed us the importance of grazing management of herbal leys alongside a paddock system. I have applied this with my lambs this year and performance has gone through the roof.

The second takeaway came from our visit in Devon, specifically Dunbia Jaspers. Seeing the entire process from lamb selection to the end carcase and the real market demands really deepened my understanding.

The third and final takeaway is the networking. Industry experts, thought-provoking farmers looking to push the boundaries, and not forgetting the now great friends we made with our fellow Next Generation Ambassadors.

The experience has given me the push to try and branch out – the opportunities are endless, we've just got to go out there and find them.

Emily Jones Ceredigion



I feel incredibly honoured to have had the opportunity to be part of this programme. It has helped increase my knowledge, opened my eyes to potential new ideas to bring back to my family farm and helped shape me as a more confident young farmer.

There have been many highlights, including a personal development mentoring session with Wyn Owen, inspiring me to look into a Nuffield Scholarship. The supply chain session was important, as I contribute directly and feel this should be something all farmers should understand better. I have also made some lifelong friends, learning from each other and grow within our current roles.

Here on our family farm, we have already implemented changes including improved recording in the commercial flock to match what we have previously done with the pedigree animals.

Richard Oglesby Northumberland



I have thoroughly enjoyed this year's NSA Ambassador programme. It has been a valuable and thought-provoking experience. A personal highlight for me was getting to know the other ambassadors. It was brilliant to discuss the great job everyone is doing and bounce ideas off each other from different sheep systems.

It was useful to cover a wide range of sheep farming topics, business and the supply chain. Personal highlights for me included visiting farmer Richard Brown from Stockton upon Tees, County Durham, with consultant Liz Genever looking at correct grazing management for herbal leys, and the session with independent consultant Wyn Owen, who taught us about time management, conflict resolution and people management.

Emma Clapp Edinburgh



I have loved being a part of the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme and I feel it has really benefitted me and my career.

I came away from each delivery session with more knowledge and inspiration, as well as meeting some great likeminded people along the way. A highlight for me would be visiting the abattoir as this is something I had not done before. I also really enjoyed our session with Philippa Page where we had some good discussions around sheep health.

I would encourage any young person who is involved in the sheep industry to apply for the programme!

George Fussey Lincolnshire



The NSA Next Generation programme has been a fantastic experience. The amount of knowledge and experience I have gained over the course of the four sessions has been invaluable. I am very privileged to have been able to take part in it.

One of the highlights has been meeting the fellow ambassadors. Sharing different ideas and talking to forward thinking people has made the programme even more enjoyable. It has certainly given me plenty of inspiration to implement into the business going forward.

We visited a number of amazing farms across the UK, each one of them providing not only impressive ideas but also incredible approaches to farming. This has certainly changed my mindset on the way farming should be undertaken and moved the goalposts of where I see my business going.

Kathryn Dick Stirlingshire

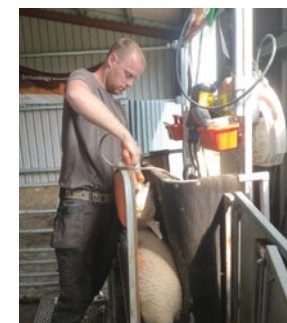


The 2024 NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme has been one of the best things I have experienced. It has expanded my knowledge of the sheep industry and allowed me to meet concurring people from across the country.

The farm tours were brilliant, seeing different systems and meeting the people who manage them, all who have a connection with the NSA. I came away with a new sense of passion for the industry, as well as some personal goals for the future of my own flock.

The best part of the programme has to be the friends I've made along the way – all of who I admire for their own journeys within the sector.

William Egerton County Fermanagh



I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme. The experience has been so much more than I expected.

One of my favorite sessions was the supply chain one. It started off with an informative talk from AHDB's Steve Powdrill explaining to us the differences between each carcase grade and fat class. The next day we went to Dunbia Jaspers where we got to see the live-to-dead process ending with a hands on practical to test our understanding of the grading process.

One thing I have learnt from the rest of the ambassadors is I should focus more on a work life balance. It has become too easy to get lost in work.

Megan Price Hampshire



This year's shepherding has brought its ups and downs, so being part of the ambassador programme has been both useful and enjoyable.

We have had to fight fluctuations in worm burdens, being put into the bluetongue restriction zone and a wet harvest, but things are beginning to look more positive. Our lambs are thriving on the stubble turnips, I have expanded my knowledge within the industry above and beyond what I could ever have imagined, and I have met some amazing people along the way.

It has been a pleasure to have visited so many wonderful farms this year, and I can't wait to see what the future holds.

Jack Fletcher Norfolk



I have thoroughly enjoyed the programme this year. It has been a huge benefit to my career and I would thoroughly recommend anyone to become an ambassador. To be brought up to date on the ever-changing sheep industry with help from the NSA was amazing. *Continued overleaf.*

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Images courtesy of trial participants

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► The two sessions that stood out to me were the visit to the abattoir – I was impressed by the efficiency of the whole enterprise from the lairage all the way to the chiller – and the NSA Sheep Event.

The session at NSA Sheep 2024 was slightly different for me as I was also competing in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition, representing NSA Eastern Region. I completed all the tasks and finally came 8th overall, which I was pleased with, being the youngest competitor.

Sean Jeffreys Carmarthenshire

This has been a brilliant opportunity to meet and build friendships with likeminded, driven individuals throughout the country. It was also a chance to build a better relationship with NSA and appreciate all the work it does on behalf of the industry.

NSA Sheep 2024 was my highlight. It was my first visit and won't be the last. I also took a lot from the live to dead/marketing best practice course.

Currently I'm in New Zealand but I should be home by the time you read this. I'm working with a company tailing lambs and it's allowed me to visit some impressive set ups, but also opened my eyes to the differences in production systems, highlighting how heavily regulated UK agriculture is.

Thanks once again to NSA for the opportunity and to my fellow ambassadors for being so open and honest. I've made friends for life.



Ailish Ross Warwickshire

I have thoroughly enjoyed the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme. It was an honour to be selected as part of a fantastic group and it has been a pleasure to get to know all the ambassadors making long lasting friendships.

Being able to hear from industry leaders across a wide range of topics was a fantastic opportunity and highlighted different perspectives and topics to consider. The trip to the abattoir in Cornwall gave insight into a part of the sector not always easily accessible, and the session with vet Phillippa Page was really valuable too.

I am excited to see what the future brings with the start of my own flock and I thoroughly look forward to staying involved with NSA.



Llywelyn Rosser Gloucestershire

Being part of the 2024 NSA Ambassadors has been a privilege. I came away with new ideas and approaches from every session.

Getting to travel to different parts of the country and see how the sheep industry varies was very interesting. One of my favourite sessions was the abattoir tour seeing the whole process from picking lambs out in the lairage and grading them live then seeing the carcass after death. We also had a fascinating tour around JCB Farms.

It has been a massive honour to have been involved and I have made some great friends and learnt so much. I look forward to getting involved further in NSA.



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Invaluable advice from your peers will help you through tough times

By Dave Gregory, NSA Treasurer



Dear Dave... Well, what can I say, what a time you're going to have in this industry and with NSA.

It will all start from meeting a man called John Thorley at the age of 26, a man whose knowledge and passion for NSA and the wider sheep industry will inspire you to join the NSA South West Regional Committee.

Over the next 30 years you will be privileged to meet, work and be lucky enough to call your friends not only the great and good of the sheep industry, but normal farmers like yourself who feel they can make a difference just by being involved and helping to guide a unique charity.

Inspiration

You will enjoy all the time spent with NSA. It will be challenging with differences of opinion from sheep farmers all over the UK, but Chief Executive Phil Stocker's enthusiasm, work ethic and can-do attitude even in difficult times will be an inspiration not only to you but everyone he meets. The list of people who help you along the way goes on... Jonathon Barber, John Geldard and of course Samuel Wharry, who I still miss very much, to name but a few.

Your involvement with the NSA South West Region will continue throughout, working with Sue Martyn to organise NSA Sheep South West, which you will see grow over that time. You can be very proud of the hard work put in by the regional committee, which still astonishes me to this day.

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. Here Dave Gregory, NSA Treasurer and NSA South West Region Committee member, gives his younger self some wise words of advice.



Dave and Kevin Harrison have been friends since school.

The pinnacle of your time with NSA will come with the presentation of the NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for Unsung Hero to you in 2024. This unfortunately means its compulsory to have your photograph taken again. Your dislike of having your photograph taken will never fade.

Knowledge

Listen and take in all the advice given to you by your peers now, as they might not be around when you need them most. The knowledge they have gained over a lifetime of experience will help you through tough times in your life.

You will go through some challenging health issues over the next 30 years. Listen to what your body is telling you. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Take time to get things checked

and don't be nervous about the outcome.

Try not to worry about day-to-day things, money, weather, next year's lamb prices. Deal with each day as it comes. Get through it and deal with the next day tomorrow – it will still be there waiting for you.

Friends will come and go over time and you'll soon get to know which ones are important. Look after them. They'll be there to help and support when you really need them.

I feel I've written down a list of clichés – and can hear Dad telling me many of things I've now thought of myself. That might be true, but these things will always be important whatever generation.

Oh and one last thing. Don't step off a motorbike at 60mph – it will hurt!



Dave's top tip is to learn as much as you can from your peers.



Dave says trust your instincts – if something doesn't feel right it probably isn't.

All of the varied breeds on farm have a distinct market.

NSA South West Chair demonstrates progress with performance recording

Building a family business not solely reliant on one market has been a key part of the success achieved for the Rossiter family near Kingsbridge, South Devon.

The family has grown a reputation for good quality breeding stock coming from their Huish flock of pedigree Poll Dorsets. In recent years the introduction of additional breeds, the Exlana and Aberblack, to the farm have opened further markets and complemented the enterprise.

The farm currently runs just over 600 Poll Dorset, 200 Aberblack and 225 Exlana ewes. NSA South West Chair Rich Rossiter considers all three complimentary. "Our combination of breeds mean we lamb three times a year and can meet market demand throughout the year," he comments.

Remaining the predominant flock on the farm, Rich admits the Poll Dorset is a favourite of his

and it seems their popularity continues to grow. "There are more farmers coming into the breed again, not necessarily in big numbers but it's good to have more interest," Rich explains.

"The early lambing trait is the main draw. They are beginning to appeal to those looking for sheep on cover crops where the ewes can lamb early with lambs finished quickly and away before planting of the main spring crops. The ewes then just need maintaining through the spring and summer. They don't need rich grazing as they return to condition easily."

Opportunities

The majority of Dorsets are lambed in September and October with the farm's other lambing periods in January, for the Aberblacks, and in March for the Exlanas, providing further opportunities for Dorset lambing if required.

All sheep are lambed indoors. Rich says: "It's labour intensive but it works best for us. It removes the problem with foxes and, as performance recording is important, it's more easily completed indoors."

"Ewes are brought in as close as we can to lambing and are kept in for a minimal amount of time – maybe just a few days before being turned back out. We're trying something different this year putting twins onto a vetch and rye grass mix to see if we can boost growth with extra protein. They will have access to creep as well."

All lambs are kept entire with 50-60 Dorset ram lambs selected for future sale through private or pedigree sales. Of these, 25 will be selected to run on to shearlings. All other finished lambs are sold to Waitrose, with which the family have had a contract since the supermarket's Dorset lamb scheme began.

By Katie James, NSA



Rich Rossiter.

Around 120 Dorset ewe lambs are kept for breeding and with other females, including in-lamb ewes, are sold through the farm's own breeding sale every August.

Stock across the breeds are performance recorded to aid the selection process. "I wouldn't back away from recording – it's a useful tool when breeding replacements," Rich adds.

Genetics

An interest in genetics, data and the benefits it can bring has led to this progressive attitude towards sheep breeding. Rich's dad David, who sadly passed away in November, was a founding member of the Sheep Improvement Group, which developed the Exlana breed.

The farm is part of the Breed for CH4nge project and has also begun testing the DNA parentage of the Exlana and Dorset flocks providing genotypes and aiding selection.

This information has allowed the farm to trial mob mating. Rich comments: "The Dorset lambing has been much tighter and we've got more ewes in-lamb so it's been a success."

The DNA parentage test requires Rich to take a tissue sample from lambs at birth. The samples

are then shipped to New Zealand where data for the flock is stored. Samples are identified before the information on the parentage of the lambs is returned in about six to eight weeks.

The use of data can be intimidating but Rich says: "We are used to doing this now and find the information really interesting, validating what you are doing. We are producing a lot of data, but it's only good if you use it. If we are producing sheep that can grow quicker, reduce days to slaughter and their phenotype is right then it's worth doing."

The farm's focus on genetic selection means desirable traits across all breeds are being enhanced. Rich explains: "We brought in some Australian genetics to our Dorset flock and this has brought length and an improved carcase. We're now trying to shorten the tail of our Exlanas and are confident we can do this in just one or two generations."

Growing demand

Rich believes a shorter tail could increase demand for the shedding breed. "The demand for the breed appears to be growing. Because of the savings to be made on shearing, fly treatment and reduced worming we calculated a saving of £6-£7 per ewe," he comments.

"We do still FEC and also blood test for IgA levels, indicating the sheep's ability to tolerate worms and leading to decreased anthelmintic use. This information is being used for stock selection."

A loss of National Trust grazing land has, for the past few years, meant Exlana numbers were restricted. But the family has been able to secure additional land. "We are going to grow numbers again, hopefully to 400-500 ewes," says Rich.

"We don't usually lamb ewe lambs but are this year to increase numbers quicker. We've pushed them on herbal leys so they're well grown. Ordinarily we would run ewe lambs on some rough grazing and give them a bit more time to grow. I think it can give them a bit more longevity," he says.

Aberblack ewe lambs are also given time to grow on permanent pasture before going to the ram. This part of the business produces shearling rams sold back to Innovis or private customers with female replacements kept. All other finished lambs are sold deadweight.

The three separate flocks are run over a total of 1,000 acres (405ha) comprising of a third owned

“

I wouldn't back away from recording – it's a useful tool when breeding replacements.”

Rich Rossiter

”

DNA parentage tests are being used this year following mob mating.

land and two thirds rented from six different landlords, including the National Trust in Bolberry Down near Salcombe, Devon.

Restrictions on this land mean sheep are no longer able to graze the area from 31st March to 1st August. Mowing is still permitted allowing the farm to make the most of the forage availability. Rich says: "We try to cut as much for hay as possible. This year with no long dry spell and few very hot days we've been able to make almost 800 bales from the 150-200 acres (60-80ha) cut."

Improvement

The Sustainable Farming Incentive improved grassland offering has led to the farm rotating ram lambs on herbal leys this year resulting in a massive difference to growth rates. "Going into winter the ram lambs are looking really strong," Rich comments. This improvement means he is looking to plant a further 30 acres (12ha) under this scheme next year.

Around 50 acres (20ha) of kale or forage rape are planted as cover crops for feeding the rams through winter and will also feed the Dorset ewe and ram lambs once weaned.

As Rich looks to maximise opportunities, he is hoping to use his understanding of genetic enhancement to grow the enterprise. Plans are in place for the family to be the first to produce Australian White lambs in the UK, a meaty, shedding

breed that can lamb out of season. Embryos will be imported into his Dorset ewes next April with the first lambs arriving next autumn.

"In the next five to 10 years we'd like to increase sheep numbers, potentially keeping another 1,000 ewes. I hope this will include a good number of an out of season shedder we can breed with the Australian White and Exlana genetics. I am hopeful there will be a demand for this," Rich concludes.

Farm facts

- Rich was an NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2018.
- Rich is supported by his wife Alice and three young daughters, Florence, Ruby and Mabel.
- The farm has 250 acres (100ha) of arable ground.
- Rich contracts on 450 acres of arable for neighbouring farmer.
- All finished lambs are sold deadweight. The farm also sells 50-60 lamb boxes.

All stock is lambed indoors to avoid fox predation and aid recording.

The family is keen to grow Exlana numbers again.

Stability strategies for navigating volatility in farm businesses

In recent times, volatility has become an inevitable and ongoing challenge for farm businesses, impacting both input costs and output prices.

Whether in the form of fluctuating commodity prices or unpredictable expenses, a strategic approach is required to create a sustainable business and ensure long-term success. Acknowledging and addressing issues is the cornerstone for developing resilient strategies tailored to the unique needs of each farming enterprise.

One crucial tactic for mitigating risk involves keeping costs low to achieve the greatest profit margin. For most, the first and fundamental step is understanding your cost of production. Only once this is achieved can you begin looking for efficiencies.

A recurring theme has been lower input systems, less reliant on purchased inputs. These have been lower yielding but far more resilient to external factors and, therefore, more profitable in tougher markets. By striving for the lowest cost of production, farms can not only cope with challenging times but are also better positioned to capitalise on favourable market conditions, maximising profitability when opportunities arise.

Farm budget

Central to financial planning is the production of a farm budget. A budget is not just a forecast produced at the start of the financial year; it should be a live document regularly reviewed and adapted depending on market conditions, supporting long-term planning and strategic decision-making. It is also fundamental when assessing borrowing requirements and approaching banks for lending or assisting with business restructuring.

Intrinsically linked to this is the ability to manage cash flow. Many farm businesses are bound by overdrafts and finance limits. If you can manage your cash flow proactively you can buy when market conditions are favourable, rather than out of necessity. Purchasing inputs forward at advantageous prices, coupled with strategic selling during market upswings, enables you to sell when conditions are right, not when you are forced to.

Successful and effective farm businesses ensure sufficient headroom in their forecasts. Ideally, in more profitable times, building cash reserves can provide a buffer for more difficult times. In practice, some run a separate bank account to build a rainy day fund for more difficult times or opportunistic purchases.

Achieving stability extends beyond cost of production and cash flow. It requires a comprehensive understanding of market dynamics and a forward-looking mindset. By staying on top of market trends and proactively planning for future contingencies, you can position yourself for success amidst uncertainty.

Selling can often be a gamble, and while it is tempting to hold out for the top of the market, a better strategy is to sell when you can see sufficient profit and the recovery of costs. Managing volatility in farm businesses demands a holistic approach, requiring a clear understanding of market

forces, coupled with proactive planning and a commitment to financial resilience. By embracing these principles, farm businesses can not only withstand volatility but thrive.

Uncertainties

As farm businesses confront the uncertainties of tomorrow, you must recognise volatility not as an insurmountable obstacle but as a catalyst for innovation and resilience. By adopting strategic approaches, market engagement and financial management, you can create a sustainable business, achieving long-term prosperity.

You are deeply connected to your business, which can make it difficult to step back and consider new approaches. It's easy to feel disheartened by the weather, volatile markets and crop prices, but there is advice available to help navigate these challenges. Farm advisory services can help you, with programmes being offered free of charge in some nations.



Time sales to achieve sufficient profit.



Farm budgets are central to financial planning.

The Register of Sheep Advisers



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

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Interested in becoming an adviser?

Find out how to be accepted onto the professional register at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/rosa/become-a-rosa-adviser



Practical elements to farm resilience and the availability of support

Adopting rotational grazing and integrating trees and hedges can also boost resilience.

Uncertainty has been the theme over the last few years on farms across the country, so it's good to focus on the practical things you can implement to help build resilience into sheep farming.

Lameness, lamb losses and parasites all have an impact on the bottom line. In most flocks, each of these issues will have a small impact individually. But when combined they may start to look significant. Start with the issue you consider to be the most relevant to your farm and work through it as it is much easier to handle them separately.

If that is lameness implement the five point plan – quarantine, treat, avoid, cull and vaccinate. The easiest aspect of this is making sure you don't buy any new problems in. Quarantining any new animals has many health benefits and is well worth the separate management group for the short time required.

Early detection

Early detection and treating animals promptly either as individuals or as a group through the footbath will have a big impact. When using a footbath make sure you are following best practice – ensuring water is replaced regularly and the correct dosage and stand in time is used, for example. Get your vet involved to implement an improved farm health plan.

Unfortunately, we can't control the weather, but we can make choices on breed selection, lambing location and timing – early or late spring and ewe nutrition to name a few – to help reduce lambing losses. There will be different influences on every farm dictating some of the above, but with the price of lamb where it has been over the last few years it is well worth working through and seeing if you can improve the survival rate in your flock.

Advice and resources on parasite control are available on the Sustainable Control of Parasites

in Sheep website. What I will highlight though, are the funding options available across the UK with a focus on animal health. For example, the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway option for worming treatment checks in England.

Take advantage of the £436 review – a visit from your vet to go through your health plan in detail – and then access additional funding (£639 for sheep farms) to look at control and eradicating certain endemic diseases, including parasites, mastitis, iceberg diseases and abortion.



Soil health is important for improving your grazing platform.

Another practical element is making the most of your grazing platform. Taking a spade to your soil is a good starting point to understand what is going on in your soil and there is guidance on doing visual evaluation of soil structure (VESS) and worm counts available on the AHDB website, including videos as well as printable instructions, both on how to carry out practical assessments and what the soil is telling you.

Before spending money on other lab tests or on contractors, have a look at your soils and let them guide you on the priorities. There may also be funding available to do this, such as the CSAM1 Sustainable Farming Incentive option in England, which covers testing soil organic matter across land parcels.

Healthy soils are the first step in maximising output from your grazing platform, which

allows you to minimise bought in feed, adding further economic resilience to your business by minimising labour and reducing costs. Integration of diverse forages and improved pasture management through techniques like rotation grazing will also help maximise grazing potential of your farm, potentially reducing finishing times, which can reduce emissions.

Fenced boundaries are not an obvious one in terms of resilience, but having your infrastructure well set up makes life easier and cheaper down the line. Something helpful to get checked off the to-do list is ensuring your boundaries are in good condition and considering where permanent fence lines may be beneficial to your grazing strategy, along with water infrastructure if considering rotational grazing.

Funding

Again, there may be government funding available such as FG2 sheep netting at £7.47 per metre through Countryside Stewardship. This can be used to protect watercourses and environmental features. There is also Sustainable Farming Incentive option BND1 to maintain dry stone walls at £27 per 100m, helping to fund fixing gaps, and is a very simple option to manage and record.

Adding hedges and trees into your boundaries comes with multiple benefits to increase resilience; soil, water management, shade, shelter and animal health can all be improved. Fencing a new hedge comes under the environmental feature mentioned above, and you can be funded for fencing both sides of the hedge. There are also further boundary options for managing hedgerows, including newly planted ones (CHRW2), and establishing or maintaining hedgerow trees (CHRW3).

The take home message is to explore all options – efficiencies, grants and changes in direction – considering how they can make your business more resilient across the board.

Integrate trees into your enterprise to increase your business resilience

The wettest 18-month period on record combined with expected future periods of extreme heat means methods for climate mitigation are increasingly crucial.

This, coupled with a move from area payments to one based on payments for environmental actions in England – and discussion underway as to how farmers will be supported to deliver environmental outputs alongside food production in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – is leading to uncertainty in how you plan your businesses.

Helen Chesshire of the Woodland Trust says: “One solution is to utilise and expand the natural infrastructure on your farm, be that hedges, shelterbelts or in-field trees such as scattered trees, clumps or alleys.

“Also known as agroforestry, or on livestock farms silvopasture, the integration of trees and shrubs into your farming systems is proven to deliver a range of benefits. These include direct benefits (shelter and browse), benefits to the wider environment (pollution mitigation, water management, habitat creation and carbon sequestration) as well as products (such as wood fuel, timber or even fruit and nuts).

Microclimate

“Trees and shrubs enhance the microclimate, which is going to become increasingly important with more adverse weather predicted,” she adds.

Research shows the microclimate created by a shelterbelt can extend up to 20 times the

height of the tall trees, with a 10m tall shelterbelt creating shelter up to 200m either side.

Lindsay Whistance of the Organic Research Centre reports: “It’s been demonstrated shade from a well-designed silvopasture scheme can reduce solar radiation by 58% compared to open pasture and skin temperature of cattle can be 4°C lower. Along with higher welfare, animal productivity is better maintained when they have access to shade in hot weather and the landscape is utilised more evenly than open pasture.

Buffer

“With too little shade there is a risk of overcrowding and disease, death of vegetation and soil compaction. Cold winds negatively affect air temperature too. For example, with a windspeed of 24kph and an air temperature of 2°C, the effective temperature becomes -7°C. Trees act as a buffer against temperature fluctuations, reducing the need to feed animals extra energy for heat production.”

The benefits from shade and shelter will have a direct impact on margins. For example, an upland farm in Scotland with 7% tree cover has estimated the shelter from grazing within trees has delivered savings of £6 per ewe. Other trials have shown daily liveweight gains will increase by 10-21% as a direct results of good shelterbelts.

Trees are a natural source of shade, shelter and browse for sheep.



Trees also improve soil drainage and can keep the soil warmer for longer in early spring and late autumn. Silvopasture trials in Northern Ireland demonstrated an extension of the grazing and cropping season by up to 17 weeks based on a 40% soil moisture content as a cut off when compared to pasture.

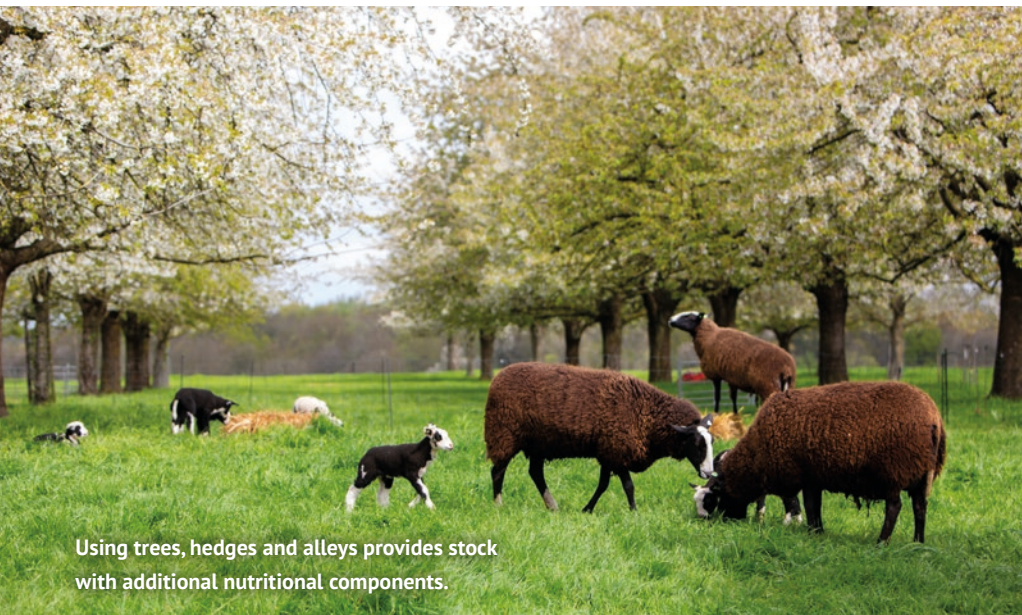
Farmers are increasingly seeing the benefits of tree browse as part of their grazing rotations, with some starting to create browsing hedges and alleys. The nutritional composition of tree leaves, such as willow, can provide necessary trace minerals (for example cobalt for weaned lambs when late summer grass levels are too low) as well as anti-inflammatory compounds and help decrease the worm burden of livestock.

Science

The science behind agroforestry is sound. If designed and established well, schemes can avoid the trade-offs between food production and environmental actions. Funding is increasingly available, and supply chains are starting to demand action is taken to help mitigate climate change and nature decline.

Mrs Chesshire concludes: “The first step is to consider what shrubs and trees you already have on your farm and their condition. Then within your wider farm business plan decide what your objectives are for restoring and increasing tree cover. It is always best to seek advice and there are a growing number of agroforestry advisers. Also seek out producers who have already implemented agroforestry, as they are a great source of practical advice.”

The Agroforestry Show will run on 10th-11th September 2025.



Using trees, hedges and alleys provides stock with additional nutritional components.

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Free app provides tips for health planning and risk management

By Alison Braddock & Foteini Manolaraki, SRUC



The primary goal of a farm health plan is to reduce livestock disease and improve production performance.

This also helps with sustainability targets as healthy animals tend to have a better environmental footprint and reduced greenhouse gas emissions over their lifetime.

According to Defra in England in 2023, 73% of farms had a health plan, with 61% being written or recorded and 12% unrecorded. Of those with a health plan, 85% completed them with the help of a vet or adviser, a collaboration that has increased over the past decade.

Since 2011, the proportion of livestock farms engaging in animal health and welfare and disease management training has risen from 50% to 69% in 2023. In more recent years, the proportion that undertake this type of training routinely has also increased, highlighting a rising interest. But, 27% of livestock farms still do not use any form of health planning, and this figure seems to be static.

Early detection

Every farm is unique, so it's crucial to plan for specific conditions and disease challenges. Tailoring a health plan to a farm's needs helps address unique risks and opportunities. Regular health monitoring is essential to detect early signs of illness, injuries, and overall stock condition.

Health planning should be more than just a paper exercise; it should enable monitoring and measuring improvements year on year. As livestock health and welfare are prioritised for farmer payment schemes, planning flock health becomes even more important.

Some areas to consider when looking at flock health planning are:

- Health records: Keep detailed records of performance, health checks, treatments, health schemes, vaccinations and breeding data.
- Disease prevention: Control farm access, quarantine new stock and manage sick animals effectively.
- Parasite control: Implement parasite management strategies.
- Nutrition: Provide a balanced diet tailored to different life stages.
- Performance monitoring: Regularly assess growth rates, body condition, and reproductive performance.

Data collection

There are also essential components for an effective health plan. Data collection is key, allowing you to benchmark and measure performance year on year. Even basic data collection can kickstart improvements. Involve the whole farm team, including the vet, nutritionist and consultants, to drive agreed health improvements.

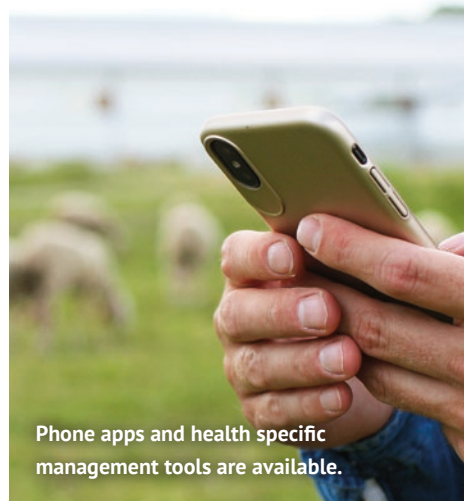
Health planning activities need to be managed by dates, setting reminders for vaccinations or treatments to ensure tasks are prioritised and completed on time. Your health plan helps comply with farm health assurance requirements and store all performance information, protocols, policy documents, biosecurity measures and team competencies in one place.

It's better to adopt a proactive approach through better health risk management than react to something that could have been prevented. Arrange regular vet meetings, ensure a vaccination programme is in place, and implement strict biosecurity protocols to prevent disease introduction and spread.

Finally, monitor and review health and productivity throughout the production cycle. Schedule regular meetings with the vet to review and update performance data, track disease incidents, and address unforeseen issues promptly – this will offer continuous improvement.

Funded by Scottish Government but available to all, the HerdPlan app offers a free forecasting tool to predict the value of your breeding flock.

Mortality, fertility and growth rates all play a part in the value of a breeding flock. The tool produces three forecasts: a hypothetical



pessimistic worst case, a hypothetical optimistic best case and a custom scenario where you can change the parameters for the flock to allow a better understanding of business opportunities and risks associated with livestock health.

The tool visually presents the potential financial gain from improved health, the financial risk of poor health outcomes, and the difference between the two. By using farm-specific parameters of performance and real market prices, the tool also facilitates informed decision-making on improving health interventions and health planning activities.

Management tools

There are other tools at your disposal, from technical web apps to simpler sticker-based wall chart systems. Templates, guidelines and best practices for tailored health plans are available from industry organisations and levy bodies.

Veterinary practices and agricultural consultants, including those on the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA), also provide bespoke services, including farm visits, health reviews and personalised advice to enhance health management strategies.

Effective flock health planning is essential. Healthier animals enjoy higher welfare, require less management time, and improve the mental health of stock-workers. They also have a lower carbon footprint, use fewer antibiotics, and contribute to a more sustainable and efficient farming operation. Prioritising prevention over treatment through biosecurity measures, regular health checks and timely interventions ensures a thriving and resilient flock.

Access the app at www.herdplan.co.uk.

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Proactive health plans provide strong foundations for a productive enterprise.





Preventing clostridial disease is a key priority for young lambs.

A timely reminder of what to get organised to ensure a smooth lambing

vetPartners

As lambing season approaches, it is essential to finalise preparations to ensure everything is in place before the arrival of the first lamb.

Mel McPherson of Avon Farm Vets says: "It goes without saying that working with your vet to create a robust vaccination programme for your ewes ahead of lambing season will help protect your future flock from infections and diseases. A key disease that needs to be considered is clostridial disease, which is picked up from the soil and can affect both lambs and sheep.

"Ewes should receive their clostridial vaccine booster four to six weeks before lambing," says Dr McPherson. "This vaccine, which also protects against pasteurella, will increase the level of antibodies in the colostrum and transfer to the lambs. If your sheep haven't been vaccinated before, they will need two injections four to six weeks apart, with the second given four to six weeks pre-lambing, which means you need to order your vaccines in time to get both in within the right timescale."

Vaccination

She says any ewe lambs kept for breeding that were given a course over the previous season should also have a booster four to six weeks before lambing. "Lambs can then be vaccinated from three-weeks-old because the antibodies from the colostrum will only last a few weeks," adds Dr McPherson.

The situation is constantly evolving, but Dr McPherson says sheep farmers also need to consider the current strain of bluetongue, BTV-3. "Bluetongue may become a bigger problem as the weather warms up in the spring, so I'd suggest you investigate vaccinating," she explains.

"There are different vaccines, but they can be used in pregnant ewes and should be given before temperatures increase.

"Currently a special licence is required for vaccination within the restricted zone but this

may have changed by spring. Please be aware that bluetongue vaccination will need to be done at a different time to clostridial vaccines as the two vaccines haven't been tested for use at the same time."

Blood sampling

Having ewes in for vaccinating can also be a useful time to take blood samples to check energy levels – an important tool in reducing the risk of twin lamb disease. "Metabolic profiling measures the beta-hydroxybutyrate, albumin and urea levels in the blood, checking energy and protein," explains Dr McPherson. "It's best done two to three weeks before lambing starts. This is close enough to flag up any issues but allows enough time to correct them.

"If you have scanned sheep, you should test five ewes from each multiple group – so five singles, five doubles, five triples – and if you haven't scanned, you should test 10 ewes in total.

"If the testing highlights any ewes are showing low energy levels, you can start supplementary concentrate feeding," Dr McPherson says, also recommending routine body condition scoring of ewes. This is with the aim of monitoring for changes in body condition, more than overall score.

"You don't want to see ewes losing or gaining weight during this time," says Dr McPherson.

"The aim is for lowland ewes to have a body condition score of 3.5 at tupping and 3-3.5 at

lambing, and hill ewes should be at 2.5 from tupping to lambing."

This is also a good opportunity to make sure you are stocked up with propylene glycol ready for lambing. "Ewes with twin lamb disease should be treated after discussion with your vet, but it's a good idea to have propylene glycol on farm in case it is needed," adds Dr McPherson.

"Make sure everyone checking sheep is clued up on the early signs of twin lamb disease; these are separation from the flock leading to wandering, twitching and teeth grinding."

Worming

Historically farmers were advised to worm around lambing time due to immune suppression causing a lift in worm egg production, known as the peri-parturient rise. But, Dr McPherson says if ewe nutrition is good, that rise should be minimal, and the guidance is now to carry out faecal worm egg counts to monitor worm levels.

"Faecal worm egg counting of ewes can be done two to three weeks pre-lambing, so at the same time as your clostridial vaccines and metabolic profiling," she explains. "If there are eggs present you can then worm the ewes and avoid pasture contamination for lambs.

"Tests are particularly looking for both strongyles including haemonchus; the latter also

affects adult sheep and they won't show any signs of scour, but they do become anaemic."

Worming management will differ between systems and is less of a concern for farmers with early lambing flocks fully housed for lambing.



Dr McPherson stresses the need for gloves during any assisted lambings.

Dr McPherson says those who have sheep grazing in the run up to lambing, but inside for lambing itself, are advised to carry out worm egg counts.

Along with propylene glycol, there are a number of other items useful to have in stock ready for lambing. "Starting with the basics, make

sure you've replenished your stocks of lube and gloves. You should wear gloves when lambing," advises Dr McPherson.

"Strong 10% iodine solution is your best product for navels as it dries them out, making it better than antibiotic sprays which have no benefit once they are rubbed or licked off. Also make sure you have lambing ropes ready to use, and plenty of disinfectant to clean them between ewes."

Pain relief

Dr McPherson recommends having pain relief in stock for difficult lambings and says this is a far better option than antibiotics. "Pain relief will do far more for an ewe who has had a difficult lambing than antibiotics, as the problem is likely bruising rather than an infection," she says.

She also recommends making sure the lambing team has been given training on how to stomach tube a lamb to ensure it is done correctly and safely.

"You may also want to buy some sachets of powdered colostrum for emergencies," adds Dr McPherson. "If a lamb can't have their mother's colostrum, the best alternative is colostrum from another ewe on your farm, rather than a ewe from another farm. And if you can't source ewe's colostrum then use the powdered form; cow colostrum should be your last resort."



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Managing grazing based on parasite risk helps protect against worms.

Understanding internal parasites to manage them more sustainably

Sustainable worm control requires the integration of multiple methods, as relying on one method alone will not work.

For example, attempts to control worms utilising wormers alone is likely doomed to failure as worms evolve resistance to the wormers, so they cease to be effective. The heavier the reliance on wormers the faster this occurs.

There is individual variation in susceptibility to worm infection, as well as variation between breeds. Some of this is due to genetic factors. Resistant animals have a greater immune response to the worms and so have lower worm infection levels. Resilient animals are better able to cope with a worm burden. Thus, it is possible to breed more worm resistant or resilient animals.

In the UK, faecal worm egg counts (FECs) form the basis for estimated breeding value scores, which have some degree of correlation to resistance to worm infection. In other countries anti-worm saliva IgA antibody levels are used to identify worm-resistant sheep. Work in the UK has suggested a poorer correlation between this measure and FEC, but has shown blood IgA levels might be a useful tool in identifying more resistant sheep in future, and using this a selective breeding tool is being trialled.

Worm avoidance

The ultimate in worm avoidance is housing animals all year round, though this is not practicable for the majority of flocks. Other methods of avoidance include moving sheep onto clean grazing frequently. Clean grazing is fields not grazed by sheep in the past two years, whereas pasture grazed recently by lambs, rams or lactating ewes is likely to be more heavily contaminated.

The time period sheep can safely graze a pasture before the eggs they have shed develop

into infectious larvae is determined by temperature and, to a lesser extent, rainfall and weather variations. The larvae do die off over time, but this die off is by-and-large slower over the winter than the summer, meaning significant reduction in pasture contamination may take six to nine months in the winter, but only three months in the summer. Hay or silage making usually reduces worm burden significantly.

Putting lambs onto relatively tall grass and then moving them before they have grazed it down below 5-6cm will help them avoid the majority of larvae, as these are concentrated at the bottom of the grass stems. The more immune ewes can then be used to graze the grass down to the desired residual. Sheep grazing non-grass forages may not be exposed to as many worm larvae, nor will more extensively grazed sheep.



Inappropriate use of wormers can lead to rising resistance.

Sheep do not share many worm species with horses or cattle, so pastures previously grazed by these species will be low risk. This is not true of alpacas or goats.

Good nutrition of the sheep will maximise their resistance to infection. We know providing high protein diets to ewes in late pregnancy reduces the rise in worm egg counts that usually occurs around lambing. Growing lambs quickly and moving them off farm (to sale or slaughter) limits

the time they have to accumulate worms and will reduce the effective stocking density of the farm.

Certain plants, for example chicory, are known to have intrinsic anti-worm properties, so planting areas of these to graze can help.

Treatments

Treatments are likely to be required to control worms in sheep, unless they are housed all year, have very extensive grazing or well managed using the other techniques described here. It is likely older broad spectrum wormers, including benzimidazoles (group one white drenches), levamisole (group two yellow drench) and macrocyclic lactones (group three clear drench), will be most commonly used. Resistance is now so frequent to benzimidazoles they are best reserved for control of *Nematodirus battus* as they remain broadly effective against this particular species.

If multiple treatments using these wormers occur during the grazing season, consider using one of the new classes of wormer (group four-AD, orange or group five-SI, purple) for the treatment in late August/September. This break drench can help prevent the accumulation of resistant worms.

Speak to your vet for biosecurity advice. To prevent importing resistant worms any quarantine treatment with the aim of excluding resistant worms should use at least one (ideally both) of the two newer wormers, orange and purple. Incoming sheep should be dosed on arrival, housed or yarded for 48 hours and then turned out onto dirty grazing – that recently grazed by the home flock.

If *Haemonchus contortus* is the primary problem there are more treatment options available, as there are narrow-spectrum products that just treat haemonchus and do not affect other worms available. Again, consult your vet on their use.

As overuse is a major driver of wormer resistance, and a waste of money, it is important to

be able to distinguish when worming treatments are necessary. One of the most commonly used methods is the faecal worm egg count. This is a method of establishing the concentration of worm eggs per gram of faeces, which in turn reflects the number of adult female worms in the gut. It is not perfect – for instance it will not detect large numbers of L4 and L5 larvae, the worm egg output varies from species to species and a very loose faeces will result in an underestimated count – but it is an extremely useful tool.

Determine need

Other methods of determining need for treatment include regular weighing of lambs so decreases in growth rate (often due to increasing worm challenge) are detected.

For specific detection of haemonchus, certain labs are able to stain and identify haemonchus eggs in faecal samples. A system of scoring the colour of the conjunctivae (inside of the eyelid) called FAMACHA has been developed as a way of scoring the degree of anaemia representative of the level of impact the haemonchus infection is having. It thus allows for targeted treatment of individuals who need it, rather than the group as a whole.

As a rule, apart from at lambing time, ewes are unlikely to need treatment (though if haemonchosis becomes more common this may

become less true). At lambing, twin and triplet bearing ewes are more likely to require treatment than single-bearing ewes. Rams should be checked several times a year. Regular monitoring of lambs in the summer months is recommended.

Submitting faecal samples from treated animals seven (levamisole) or 14 (all other wormer classes) days after treatment to check whether counts are now zero will flag up whether treatment has been effective.

To prove resistance was the cause of treatment failure and to quantify how effective the wormer is a more involved test, called a faecal egg count reduction test, is required. This involves individually sampling and treating a number of animals and the resampling them.

Reducing frequency of usage, reducing reliance on wormers and quarantine treatment to prevent the import of resistant worms are positive steps towards preventing wormer resistance.

Avoidance of under-dosing by weighing sheep and checking the calibration of dosing equipment is also important, as is the correct storage of wormers. Finally, avoid treating all sheep and moving them onto clean grazing, as this ensures only resistant worm eggs are passed on the new pasture. Instead, either leave a percentage untreated or move them first and treat after several days on the new pasture.

Providing good nutrition can help reduce the risk of infection.



A good relationship with your vet can be very helpful as regards worm control and control of many other diseases. You can also find sheep-interested vets through the Sheep Veterinary Society and European specialists in small ruminant health management can either be approached directly or they can provide advice to your own vet.

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NUGENT **NSA**

Be vigilant with liver fluke set to make a comeback this season

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



Levels of liver fluke in the UK have been relatively low in recent years, but after a wet summer followed by a wet autumn in many areas, forecasts are predicting 2024-25 may buck the trend.

It is therefore important to be prepared by understanding how to make the best decisions on the need for and timing of any treatments using risk assessments, regular testing and promptly investigating losses.

The Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group is urging you not to be tempted to react to high risks warnings by resorting to the old practice of routinely treating with flukicides. Changing weather patterns and variation between areas and flocks means this is highly unlikely to result in effective control. At best you may have spent time and money on a treatment you didn't need because liver fluke are not present; at worst it gives you a false sense of security by assuming the risk is covered.

Flukicides

Flukicides do not have any persistent activity so if the sheep pick up more liver fluke in the autumn, as has happened in recent years, you will get caught out, with potentially serious consequences. Instead, take a step back and use the tools available together with help from your vet and advisers.

Historical evidence of liver fluke on your farm is a good starting point, enabling you to assess the local impact of this year's weather and

identify high risk grazing areas that could support mud snails – the intermediate host for the liver fluke.

A more detailed regional warning can be found on the National Animal Disease Information Service (NADIS) website using its parasite forecasting tool. Weather summaries from the Met Office can also indicate risks through the number of wet days locally between June and September. The more wet days during this period, the higher the chance the mud snail has thrived, increasing the liver fluke risk. You can also ask your vet or adviser if they have any feedback from testing in your area and monitor updates from the SCOPS website.

Poor performance

Don't forget to consider liver fluke as a possible factor in poor animal performance in addition to other suspects. Think about reducing the risks by using management actions such as avoiding high risk fields, fencing off wet areas or housing early to avoid re-infection.

Investigation of any sudden deaths in sheep is extremely valuable because a post mortem is the most definitive evidence of liver fluke, and will help your vet identify or eliminate other possible causes. If you are selling stock direct to an abattoir, make sure you request information on the condition of livers.

Routine testing is also key. The most appropriate test depends on the time of year and class of livestock. A fluke antibody test is a blood sample looking for anti-fluke antibodies and shows the first signs of fluke exposure. It takes two to four weeks for detectable antibodies to



Regular testing helps fully understand what parasites are on your farm.

be produced. This test is most suitable for lambs in their first grazing season and best used in late summer/early autumn as an early indicator of a fluke challenge.

A positive test indicates lambs have had a liver fluke challenge this year but does not indicate the challenge level. A negative result means there has been no exposure so far but doesn't mean that will continue. Repeat testing is advised. A new lateral flow test has also been launched and is available via vets for on farm use.

Detect infection

The coproantigen ELISA (cELISA) test detects antigens in faeces due to fluke infection around two to three weeks earlier than a faecal egg count, typically from approximately six weeks post-infection. This can be carried out on individual dung samples (not pooled) and is specific for liver fluke. A positive test indicates an active liver fluke infection. A negative results means there are either no fluke, very low numbers, or young fluke which are still too immature for their secretions to exceed the test threshold. Repeat testing may be necessary. This test can be used on all classes of stock and should be used in autumn.

In late autumn through to early spring, faecal egg counts can be used to detect fluke eggs in faeces and is able to identify the presence of mature egg-laying liver fluke. Egg laying does not start until 10-12 weeks post-infection and acute fluke infection is not detected by this test.

A positive result indicates egg-laying adult fluke are present. A negative result suggests there are no egg laying adult fluke present, but there could still be large numbers of immature fluke present – so testing should be repeated depending on the risk on your farm.

More resources available at www.scops.org.uk.

Liver fluke risks could be higher due to the wet summer and autumn.

An overview of liver fluke and the challenges facing us next year



Liver fluke (*Fasciola hepatica*) can have a devastating effect on the health and welfare of grazing livestock in the UK, particularly sheep.

It can cause substantial economic losses through ill thrift, reduced performance, death and condemnation of livers in abattoirs.

Historically, control has relied heavily on the routine blanket use (and overuse) of flukicide treatments, leading to a UK-wide resistance problem. With changing patterns of infection, it is becoming increasingly difficult to control the disease.

Lifecycle

Mud snails (*Galba truncatula*) are key to the lifecycle of liver fluke, thriving in damp conditions and mild temperatures. Some snails can hibernate over winter and emerge the following spring to start the cycle again. Very cold weather reduces the snail population and prolonged freezing temperatures will kill most, but these conditions are becoming increasingly rare as our climate warms.

Liver fluke can be controlled on-farm by improving biosecurity, removing the snail population through good drainage and fencing off wet areas, co-grazing cattle and sheep in high-risk pastures, planning grazing rotation,

and monitoring stock for infection. It's vital combination fluke and worm products are not unnecessarily administered, as this poses a real danger by increasing anthelmintic resistance.

Dr Heather McCalman, HCC, says: "There is very limited choice of flukicides available to farmers and with little prospect of new ones, they must be safeguarded. Working with your vet to test and monitor will ensure the correct treatment is given and only when needed.



With milder winters more common, liver fluke risks are increasing.

Kate Hovers, NSA Wales/Cymru Region committee member and vet, says: "With changing weather patterns and levels of risk it has never been more important to test before treating. The winter months are often the chronic disease risk

period. I encourage you to watch for clinical signs in the condition of pregnant ewes, work closely with your vet to minimise infection and benefit from improved livestock performance."

Colin Evans and his family farm on the Black Mountains in South East Wales. With an average annual rainfall of over 5ft, the farm is an area of high-risk for fluke in livestock. To lower the risks, they adopted a strategic approach using testing, monitoring and management to treat the fluke but optimise anthelmintic usage.

Strategy review

In the past they would dose twice a year at set times. Joining HCC's Stoc+ health planning project prompted a more detailed strategy review and another check on anthelmintic efficacy on-farm.

Mr Evans comments: "Being in a high-risk area and having experienced losses from fluke in the past, I felt it was time to review my policy on control and use the tools of testing and monitoring available." Management decisions have since been based on close working with the local vet to control and treat in a proactive manner, and checking risk forecasts, diagnostic tests and weather conditions.

Dr McCalman adds: "There are numerous online industry resources available to advise on testing options and treatment methods, including a decision tree – a guide to test-based control." More at www.meatpromotion.wales.

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Trials demonstrate positive results for sheep grazing legume rich swards



In recent years there has been a growing interest in the use of diverse swards for grass based ruminant production systems.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of including companion species, such as increased animal and sward performance and reduced requirement for artificial nitrogen application. In response, AgriSearch has invested in several projects on commercial farms incorporating legumes and herbs in a forage production region that has traditionally focused on perennial ryegrass only.

One projects – ZeroNSile – has been looking at the incorporation of red clover in a mixture with perennial ryegrass and white clover to produce high yields of multicut silage with minimal artificial fertiliser. While the mix is primarily used for silage production, it can also be grazed by sheep (or cattle) in the autumn.

One of the farmers involved is Paraic McNeill, who farms in partnership with his father just outside Banbridge, County Down. They run a 230-ewe spring lambing flock and are streamlining management and taking steps to improve grass performance, including introducing rotational paddock grazing systems and multispecies and red clover swards.

Additional benefits

In the autumn of 2022, Mr McNeil established a 7.5 acre (3ha) mix of red clover, white clover and perennial ryegrass intended to reduce fertiliser use while producing a protein rich fodder for over wintering stock, but late summer and autumn grazing of the sward has also proved beneficial.



Multispecies swards can reduce fertiliser use and improve liveweight gain.

Daily liveweight gain of lambs grazing the red clover mix to finishing has been impressive with 350g/day achieved this autumn in comparison to lambs grazing perennial ryegrass swards, which only reached 300g/day with supplement feeding. Mr McNeil has also trialled grazing his ewe lambs on the red clover/perennial ryegrass mix pre-tupping and has had no concerns so far, with scanning percentage on the red clover mix coming back at 150% as opposed to his usual 120% scanning percentage.

The results correlate with studies conducted in the Republic of Ireland, where the addition of red clover to a perennial ryegrass sward led to an increase in pre-weaning average daily gain relative to grazing a perennial ryegrass sward. In addition, average days to slaughter were reduced, leading to reduced rates of concentrate supplementation.

Additional results from these trials did illustrate the sward mixtures responded differently to various management practices meaning appropriate management is required for successful integration into sheep grazing swards.

Similar role

Lucerne is valued for its yield, protein content, digestible fibre and drought tolerance, playing a similar role to red clover in regions experiencing warmer and drier conditions during the summer. Regions of Northern Ireland have experienced extended dry periods in recent years, which has led to difficult conditions for grazing and forage crop production. Lucerne may therefore prove to be an on-farm option to reduce the risk from changing weather trends.

Dale Orr, an organic sheep farmer based in Downpatrick, County Down, established 7.5 acres (3ha) of lucerne in 2022. Mr Orr runs a flock

of 300 ewes over 315 acres (127ha) alongside a small suckler cow enterprise. His sheep are grazed for a minimum of 300 days per year and are outwintered on turnips and silage.

Mr Orr has embraced the use of diverse swards utilising a wide variety of multispecies swards for different purposes. Lucerne was new to him and he was interested to see how it would perform in comparison.

Challenging

While pleased with the performance of the lucerne mix to date, managing the crop and feeding the silage has been challenging. In his opinion Northern Ireland lucerne would work better as part of a wider silage mix including red clover and deep rooting grasses, providing drought resistance while easing the challenges of monocrop management.

To better suit his sheep enterprise Mr Orr is now moving towards incorporating lucerne within his sheep focused multispecies grazing mixes and is looking forward to monitoring sheep performance on these going forward.

Early results on the incorporation of diverse swards or companion swards on farm has shown very promising results, particularly from the perspective of fertiliser reduction. But further research is clearly needed to ensure the delivery of ecosystems services without compromising on-farm performance.

Finding the right mixes for each individual farm enterprise scenario will be key. To date most multispecies sward trials have been done on drier farms, therefore more research is needed to identify what mixes are best suited for farms with higher rainfalls and heavier soils.

[More information on the AgriSearch website.](#)



Lucerne shows promising results for aiding drought resistance.

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Herbal leys are a useful tool for improving ewe nutrition.

How to make the most of herbal leys and maximise their potential next year

Despite the negative connotations of grazing red clover at tupping time, Jess Mighall of Cotswold Seeds says well managed herbal leys can actually boost conception rates in ewes.

Ewe body condition has one of the largest influences on follicular development and maturation, hence flushing is so often used as a short term fix to provide sub-optimal ewes with enhanced nutrition and energy to maximise ovulation and conception rates.

Miss Mighall says: "Improved nutrition is needed for at least one cycle to influence a ewe's body condition score (BCS) and fertility. Ewes that are being better fed during this period are more likely to bear multiples.

"Herbal leys show increased forage availability through the summer months where simple grass leys may drop off, while the inclusion of deeper rooting species provides drought resistance."

Forage mixtures

Including herbs in forage mixtures is an effective method of mining minerals such as copper, selenium, zinc and iodine, which supports fertility and immune function. For example, deficiency in selenium increases the risk of infertility and embryonic mortality. "Plantain and chicory have double the concentration of selenium than ryegrass," she highlights.

"With warming winters and increasing levels of anthelmintic resistance, helminths are gaining a reproductive advantage through autumn/winter, exacerbating the worm burden in pastures in the spring, coinciding with the periparturient relaxation of immunity around lambing. Including natural anthelmintic forages such as chicory, sainfoin and birdsfoot trefoil can provide anthelmintic effects, potentially improving ewe health for maximum lamb viability and growth.

"Ewes grazing higher protein legume-based forage leys have markedly improved ovulation/conception rates, and reduced abortion rates. Furthermore, birdsfoot trefoil and sainfoin are bioactive forages, meaning they contain condensed tannins, which improves protein utilisation by protecting ruminal degradation."

Research carried out in 2022 noted grazing ewes on herbal leys containing red clover (comprising 10-30% of the sward) can have a positive effect on pregnancy rates, due to improved availability and quality of forage before and during the tupping period.



Grazing red clover during tupping is still under debate.

Red clover is however known to contain two main types of phytoestrogenic compounds – formononetin and biochanin-A. Research suggests while biochanin-A stimulates liveweight gain in lambs, formononetin has detrimental effects on ewe fertility.

Miss Mighall highlights: "There are variations in the percentage of these compounds throughout the plant. While both compounds are found at their highest concentration in the leaves, formononetin dominates in the stems. Flower heads have the lowest oestrogenic activity than any other plant part. Formononetin concentration decreases as the plant matures from budding to flowering stage. Research has also noted drought stress increases the concentration

of formononetin in red clover, increasing the potential of exhibiting oestrogenic effects. "Different varieties contain varying concentrations of oestrogenic compounds and varieties with higher oestrogenic compounds may offer increased disease resistance, persistence, protein concentration and forage yield. New varieties are also being developed for low concentrations of formononetin, reducing the risk of oestrogenic effects in high red clover leys, although these varieties are currently limited."

Differing opinions

Because of these variations, opinions about the inclusion of red clover in breeding ewe diets differ and there is general advice to avoid feeding breeding ewes on leys with red clover for six weeks either side of tupping.

Miss Mighall says: "When included in a diverse herbal ley at a low percentage, the benefits of high protein, drought tolerance, nitrogen fixation and potential improvement to liveweight gains and fertility could outweigh any concerns."

It's important to still ensure ewes receive adequate nutrition post tupping. Although fertilisation takes place up to 24 hours after ovulation, implantation does not occur for another 15 days. Miss Mighall suggests the focus here should be to prevent ewes losing condition or any abrupt changes in nutrition.

"Sub-optimum body condition not only increases the risk of embryonic loss and reduces lamb viability and birthweight, but may also affect the future fertility of both ewe and her offspring," she says.

"Herbal leys will drop off in production as temperatures drop, as the clovers and herbs overwinter as a crown. Yet, they still require management to avoid becoming too leafy/proud. Lightly graze over the ley in the autumn, then take stock off by November to allow rest and recovery in preparation for spring."

Preparing for Lambing: Hypothermia and Hypoglycaemia in Young Lambs

Starvation, hypothermia, and hypoglycaemia are among the highest causes of mortality in newborn lambs – in wet and cold conditions as well as warm and sunny.

Adequate colostrum and brown fat (a type of fat that the lamb is born with) help the lamb through this period by increasing heat production. Difficult or premature births can cause weak lambs which contributes to hypothermia. Newborn lambs are fragile creatures and extremely susceptible to disease and infections. They are born with an almost sterile gut microbiome, and an exceptionally low inherent immunity. Good quality colostrum is of critical importance. In addition, lambs are born with low levels of crucial vitamins especially Vitamin E & A.

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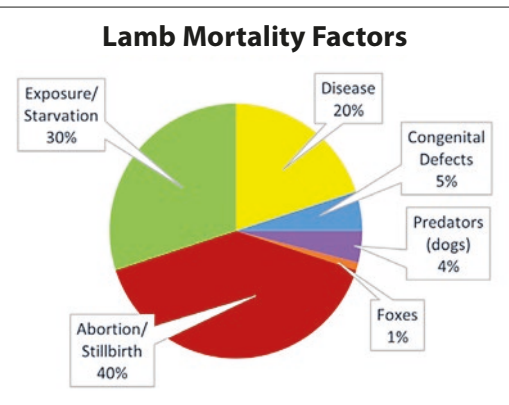
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- Egg powder which provides high



concentrations of unique proteins which are more potent against E.coli than usual colostrum antibodies.

- High levels of vitamins necessary for the young animal's metabolism and supplies especially vitamin E, which stimulates the lymphocytes in the underdeveloped immune system, thus adding a further layer of protection.
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By Dr T.B Barragry, Provita

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NSA Wales/Cymru Region funds trial for testing iceberg diseases in ewes

For the past year, NSA Wales/Cymru Region has worked alongside the Wales Veterinary Science Centre (WVSC), trialling a new test able to detect multiple iceberg diseases through a single flock screen.

Iceberg diseases of sheep, such as maedi visna and Johne's, bring a variety of health, welfare and economic consequences and can have significant detrimental impacts on the productivity and profitability of farm businesses.

Iceberg diseases are so named because it is likely the vast majority of infected stock remain hidden under the surface and those sheep with visible signs or symptoms represent just the tip of the problem. It is therefore likely iceberg diseases are reported in much fewer numbers than the reality on the ground.

The clinical signs and symptoms associated with many iceberg diseases are often mild and vague at the start of the disease process and therefore animals may not appear to be ill until the disease is severe and has had an opportunity to spread throughout the flock. This can cause production inefficiencies through persistent and long-lasting subclinical infection. Iceberg diseases are not treatable with antibiotics.



This new technology has the potential to improve iceberg disease screening nationally.

Disease testing

For good flock management, testing for iceberg diseases should become part of any investigations focusing on thin ewes or poor fertility and also as a flock screen to identify the presence of iceberg diseases before they cause production losses. But, at present, awareness and routine screening among the industry remains low. According to AHDB, fewer than 5% of farmers routinely screen for iceberg diseases.

The nature and extent of sheep movements within the UK means knowing, maintaining and protecting the health status of a flock can be difficult. While this is true of all diseases of sheep, it is especially true of iceberg diseases due to the lack of clinical signs and the low level of routine screening mentioned above.

Dr Hazel Wright of WVSC comments: "We partnered with NSA Cymru/Wales Region to develop and validate Enferplex testing for iceberg diseases in sheep. The Enferplex antibody test offered by WVSC is a multiplex elisa and can test for maedi visna, caseous lymphadenitis (CLA) and

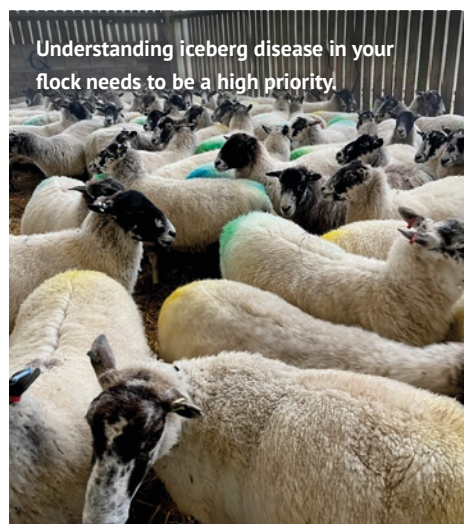
Johne's disease simultaneously meaning it is extremely cost effective.

"As we progress, we hope to add other diseases such as border disease to this repertoire. This Enferplex test is highly sensitive, so it is an excellent tool for rooting out problem sheep before they decimate a flock."

Improvements

Data from other EU countries shows that using Enferplex testing for iceberg diseases can lead to significant improvements in flock health and productivity, both at individual farm level and nationally. Reducing the commercial inefficiencies caused by iceberg diseases should make the farm more efficient, more resilient and will reduce unnecessary and costly losses in the future.

Speaking on behalf of NSA, Helen Roberts comments: "Improving the health and welfare of our flock is increasingly important to our industry. As a result, NSA Wales/Cymru Region is pleased to fund this initiative, which is not just for the benefit of Welsh sheep farmers, but for the whole of the national flock."



Understanding iceberg disease in your flock needs to be a high priority.



What's the latest from Moredun?



Utilise Moredun's advice leaflets, such as the 'Buyer Beware' advice to avoid bringing scab or anthelmintic resistant worms into your flock.

Follow the guidelines in 'Treat, Isolate, Check' to keep your flock disease free.

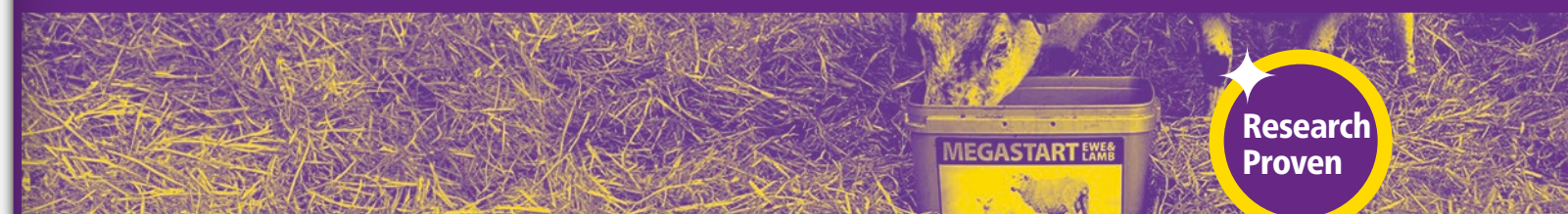
Download the leaflets at www.moredun.org.uk/resources



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New consultancy to help with regulatory changes

Preston Waldon has launched a consultancy offering strategic public affairs and reputation management services to organisations within the UK livestock sector.

Alexander Preston (pictured) of Preston Waldon says the company can help organisations navigate agricultural and rural policy, regulation, public affairs and reputation management.

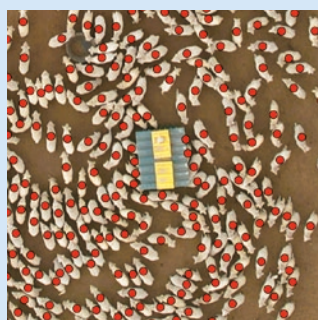
Combining a mix of industry insight, hands-on experience and strong connections, Preston Waldon says the consultancy is set to reshape how the sector approaches policy and reputation management. See www.prestonwaldon.co.uk.



AI-powered sheep counting from VeriPhy

Introducing a new technology for sheep farmers, VeriPhy's AI-driven platform accurately counts flock numbers using drone imagery.

You can upload photos to receive detailed reports with highlighted counts and summary statistics. There are no contracts or subscription fees and you pay from 2p per head per count on a pay-as-you-go basis allowing you to use it as often or as little as you need. VeriPhy says it will save time and streamline livestock management with the asset verification platform. Contact dirk@veriphy.tech or 07956 077344.



New range of granular feed supplements launched

A new range of feed supplements has been launched by Timac Agro UK, designed to aid feed efficiency in ruminants.

Spadea Rumen G and Spadea Fix'N-G are two micro-granulated mineral supplements, formulated specifically to buffer the rumen and enhance the efficiency of feed utilisation.

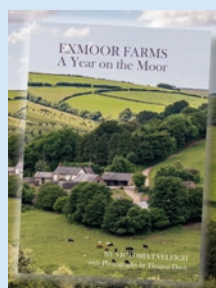
Timac Agro says managing livestock diets with these supplements, particularly during stressful periods, with high-energy diets or during any dietary transition, plays a key part in maintaining production, preventing illness and deficiencies. Spadea Fix'N is formulated as a nutritional supplement to slow down the transit of soluble nitrogen through the gut to optimise absorption and therefore protein production while minimising impact on fertility. See www.uk.timacagro.com.

Exmoor Farms: A Year on the Moor

The Exmoor Hill Farming Network and the Exmoor Society have commissioned a new book charting a farming year on Exmoor.

With help from Ian May, NSA South West Region Manager, the project records the human stories behind Exmoor's farmed landscape at a time of huge changes for agriculture.

The book costs £25 and can be posted within the UK for an additional £5 or ordered online at www.ehfn.org.uk/exmoor-farms-a-year-on-the-moor.



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Following the flock

We visit Devon, Lincolnshire and Warwickshire to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Anthony Spencer

NSA English Committee Chair, Warwickshire



I turned the rams out with this year's ewe lambs in early November with the intention of lambing them just before the main flock get going.

The singles from the older flock will be lambed indoors meaning any doubles from the young mothers can be taken off, leaving me with a lot less or often no cades to rear.

Putting the first rams out is one of my favourite moments in the calendar – turning the page on the breeding year and the anticipation of the next.

I am trying some new breeds and bloodlines this season as I move towards a self-replacing outdoor lambing system – but am still running a flying flock of North Country Mules, as it suits my system to have a late summer cash flow from the shearling sales. I don't tend to get many lambs away prime until the winter/spring months.

Demand has been exceptionally strong for the theaves this year. I bought an extra 50 ewe lambs on my annual shopping trip to Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, so fingers crossed trade and confidence continues.

It's been a strange growing year and I've found some of my sheep haven't done as well, making it harder to get ewes back into tupping condition. Luckily this is the first year I've grown a stand of fodder beet so the ewes should be back in good nick in no time.



Matt Bagley

NSA Central Region Chair, Lincolnshire



After a tough lambing due to the weather and Schmallenberg, the lambs grew well once they got outside and had the sun on their backs.

For the first time this year we split the flock in half and left the second half of the lambs to grow on grass until mid August – when we had finished all the lambs from the first batch. The majority of the first batch were finished at 11-14 weeks of age with all lambs finished by September.

The focus then turned to preparing for tupping. We kept the tups back a week, so lambing will start around 25th February in the hope we get lambs outside a bit sooner. The flock are all single sired, as they have been for years now, with what is looking like high hold rates to the first service with a quick tupping time.

We used a Logie Durno Suffolk ram on the Mules for the first time to start breeding our own Suffolk Mule replacements. We also purchased two Durno Beltex rams to try on our Texel cross ewes. The rest have gone to Beltex cross Charollais rams. All the lambs from these are produced for meat.

The sheep are now grazing the grass leys and stubble turnips on the arable land before coming inside in early January.

Peter Delbridge

NSA Chair, Devon



We have been getting on with our late summer and autumn jobs, selecting ewes for breeding, selling any draft ewes and fattening up cull ewes.

We had an issue again this year with lambs getting dirty on the plentiful wet grass. FECs revealed no resistance, but a high count of coccidiosis. I normally combat this with expensive spot treatments and was disappointed to find certain options were no longer available. In need of a solution I resorted to a herbal coccidiosis bucket, which despite my initial reservations seemed to work.

Following a successful hybrid sale of the Sheep Improvement Group, of which we are members, we have fulfilled the free UK mainland delivery of rams bought at the sale and online. It was great meeting customers.

As an Exlana breeder we are part of the Breed for CH4nge project, currently in its second year, and recently put an allocated number of lambs through the portable accumulation chambers to measure methane output. Last year we tested 72 twice, but this year the opportunity arose to put through several more, which took far more organisation than expected! Hopefully we will learn more about our sires and prove the methodology is robust so other breeds can adopt it. The data should also help us defend the wider UK sheep industry.



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