

SHEEPFARMER

APRIL / MAY 2025
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NSA SUMMER EVENTS

PREVIEWS, TEASERS AND HOST FARM FEATURES

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Rethinking agriculture in times of crisis

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



I say this without meaning to offend, but how many people in Ukraine, or other nations dealing with conflict, are considering a land use strategy or a farming roadmap within the bounds of legally binding net zero and nature recovery targets?

Probably very few, and even fewer thinking about the rights and wrongs of castrating lambs or releasing sea eagles. We are living in highly uncertain times and, while we might complain, we should be grateful we have the luxury to consider things other than just where our next meal might come from or whether the roof is going to stay over our heads.

Here we are with teams of people trying to work out what we'll need by 2050, then where and how we get there. The debate is happening and it's crucial we are at the table. The world is run by people who turn up so we will continue to turn up.

In England the Land Use Framework is out for consultation and Farming Roadmap discussions are underway. I have confidence views will be heard, but the scene presented is more advanced than a straw man that can be shot down and rebuilt.

Vision

Much of what it spells out is close to what I've been predicting for some time. It's a picture of greater levels of sustainability, protection of water and soils, more nature within our farmed areas and more areas focused entirely on nature, greater use of technology and more land used for renewable energy. Food production will be squeezed into a reduced land area but expected to be more productive.

When it comes to the food on our plates most of the talk is about localising supply chains, healthy diets, less waste, more pulses and nuts, more fresh vegetables and fruit, more diversity in grains, less but better quality meat, insects, possibly lab based proteins, sustainably caught and farmed fish, bivalves and molluscs, more provenance and ways of ensuring good food for all.

All great aspirations and an appealing vision, but it's going to need change to work at scale. While I can see many farms willing to make change if it stacks up financially, I'm not sure anyone has thought about the need for post-farmgate food infrastructure changes – the abattoirs, flour mills, storage and distribution systems, and of course retail and buying habits.

Concern

It would be wrong not to mention the challenges caused by planned changes to Agricultural Property Relief and Inheritance Tax. Will there be a U-turn, or even a smoothing of the rough edges? The signs don't look promising, but the government's absence of clarity over what it wants to achieve is seriously concerning.

On one hand it says it needs to raise taxes to fund all the things the nation needs, but then the Secretary of State says he wants farmers to plan succession to avoid paying. So is the justification about raising funds, or bringing about change in succession planning, or something more sinister?

The more recent changes to the Sustainable Farming Incentive in England are equally, if not even more, serious.

If these things are a threat to farming they can be added to the growing threat of exotic diseases. A serious, large-scale outbreak of any notifiable disease could cause serious hurt to our industry.

Not everything has been perfect, but I've been impressed by the way Defra and APHA are dealing with both. As an industry we should recognise the substantial investment of public funds into surveillance, testing and many other aspects of reducing disease risk.

Farming has overcome change before and will do again. But the pain caused by foot-and-mouth in 2001 is still etched in many minds. Pain that wasn't planned, which changed our industry permanently.

Britain is on high alert and disease control needs to be taken seriously. Change where we can exercise some control is tough enough, but the costs and mayhem caused by a major disease outbreak will see control taken out of our hands.



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David Gregory
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UK Policy & Technical Chair



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APRIL / MAY 2025

SHEEPFARMER 01

NSA 2025 AGM – save the date

NSA is pleased to announce the prestigious location of the 2025 NSA AGM in Derbyshire.

Hosted this year by David Howlett, Chatsworth Head of Farming and NSA English Committee member, with kind permission of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the meeting will take place on the afternoon of Tuesday 12th August at Chatsworth Estate Farm, Derbyshire.

All members are welcome to join the meeting as well as the interesting farm tour showcasing the estate's livestock enterprise of 3,000 breeding ewes and 300 suckler cows on 5,000 acres (2,000ha) of land surrounding Chatsworth House, including parkland, moorland and improved grassland. *Further details in subsequent editions.*



NSA AGM confirmed at Chatsworth House Estate.

NSA strengthens team to further work as the voice of the sector

NSA is pleased to welcome three new staff members to its team, furthering its work representing the UK's sheep farmers at a critical time for UK agriculture.

Following a recruitment process at the start of 2025 NSA is excited to announce that well known and respected agricultural journalist Michael Priestley has joined the team as NSA Policy Manager. Lydia Badham has taken on the role of NSA Digital Communications Officer and Anna Wilson has the new, exciting role as the NSA Technical Communications Officer.

Phil Stocker comments: "We are really pleased to have completed this latest successful recruitment process. Welcoming new team members to NSA and, in particular to our policy and communications team, with such valuable connections to the industry and a passion for a sustainable sheep sector is a fantastic accomplishment and will undoubtedly benefit NSA and its service to its members, alongside the sheep sector."



Michael Priestley.



Lydia Badham.



Anna Wilson.

First NSA giveaway winners receive prizes

Two lucky NSA supporters have received the fantastic news they are the first of many winners of this year's prize draw.

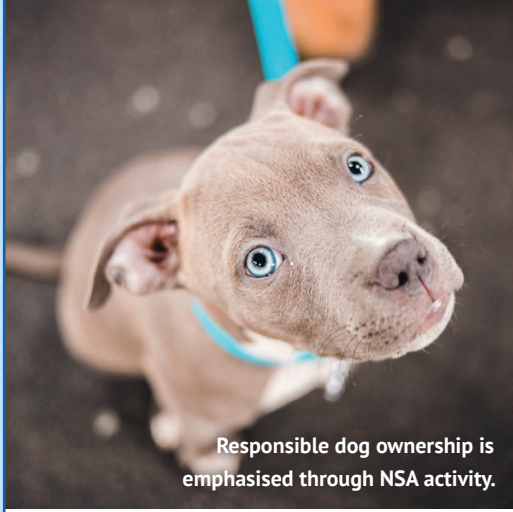
Graham Mellor from Cellarhead, Staffordshire, was selected at random as the first recipient of a Lanati Astron cord-free handpiece kit worth more than £450, kindly provided by Rurtec.

Samantha Hird from Austwick, North Yorkshire, was then selected as the February winner. NSA will share more about Graham, Samantha and future winners in the Jun/Jul edition of *Sheep Farmer*.

NSA will create 12 winners throughout 2025 meaning there are still many chances to win one of these useful prizes. The prize draw is open to any UK sheep farmer over the age of 16. Both NSA members and non-members can enter, but entries are limited to one per person/email. *See how to enter on page 35.*



Graham Mellor is looking forward to receiving his prize.



Sheep Worring by Dogs Awareness week

As *Sheep Farmer* magazine arrives with you, ongoing activity to highlight the serious issue of sheep worrying by dogs will be heightened as part of NSA's annual campaign week.

NSA will be sharing results from its latest survey of UK sheep farmers giving an insight into the impact the problem is having on farmers businesses and animal welfare. *Find out more at www.sheepworrying.org.uk.*

NSA to speak at animal science conference

NSA Project Manager Nicola Noble will be the keynote speaker at the British Society of Animal Science (BSAS) conference in April dispelling myths and emphasising the positives delivered by UK sheep farming above and beyond nutritious food and fantastic fibre.

Speaking at BSAS is a great opportunity for NSA to promote the new NSA Sustainability Report and to hear about sheep research in the pipeline that could impact the sector.

NSA's social following continues to grow

Having had an established social audience on Facebook for many years, NSA now has a growing following on Instagram and more recently TikTok.

If you are a user of these social platforms why not give NSA a follow to keep up to date with NSA and industry news as well as more light-hearted informal posts. Follow NSA on Instagram and on TikTok @nationalsheep.



A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Capital grant spending caps announced

Defra has announced new limits will apply to capital grant scheme funding when application windows reopen later this year.

According to Defra, funds were used up quickly and many missed out due to a huge demand for grants in 2024 with some single applications worth more than £1m.

NSA welcomes this announcement as, while capping payments may be restrictive, it should improve management of the funding pot. It should also prevent further abrupt announcements, such as the recent Sustainable Farming Incentive termination.

Dates for the scheme windows are yet to be announced but details on limitations have been shared under four categories:

- Water quality (includes fencing) – £25,000.
- Air quality – £25,000.
- Natural flood management – £25,000.
- Boundaries, trees and orchards – £35,000.

You can apply for a grant in more than one category, but only one application per Single Business Identifier can be submitted per year.

Applicants who applied before the November 2024 deadline and had their applications put on hold don't need to take any action. Their applications will be processed, and if approved, they'll receive an agreement to complete the work. The 4,000+ capital grant applications on hold can now be processed, while those who didn't complete before the closure can reapply later this year through the Rural Payments Agency.



Capital grants funding is confirmed for later this year.

NSA strives for national vaccine strategy

Calls for a national vaccine strategy were raised again at the second Veterinary Medicine Directive (VMD) vaccine roundtable in February.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker sits on this group to highlight the need for strategic, long-term thinking about vaccine production, supply and availability.

The shortage of many vaccines remains an ongoing issue, particularly to protect against clostridial disease and abortion. VMD is likely to arrange an industry workshop in the next few months to discuss this further. NSA recognises even when there is good availability, there is usually a shortage of supplies in smaller doses. This causes issues for smaller farms who don't require so many doses.

As discussions continue, Moredun is seeking funding to advance early-stage louping ill vaccine development. NSA will keep members updated on any progress.



NSA continues to strive for a sustainable UK vaccine supply.

Foot-and-mouth updates

Following the apparently isolated case of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in water buffalo in Germany, there has been another case in a small dairy herd in Hungary.

The case was identified in early March, stringent containment measures were initiated and testing continues to monitor the situation. The UK has banned imports of meat and animal products from Hungary to reduce the risk of FMD coming into the UK.

NSA urges all members to maintain good biosecurity on farm and report any unusual symptoms to their vets and APHA immediately.



Now is the time to check your VAN is still active.

A timely reminder to renew your VAN

Lamb exporters not in an assurance scheme must renew their Veterinary Attestation Number (VAN) annually to maintain valid registration.

A VAN meets EU export requirements, verifying health status, biosecurity and notifiable diseases in the post-Brexit era. In England, NSA suggests using the Defra Animal Health & Welfare Pathway – which covers funding for an annual vet visit and a separate endemic disease programme – to renew your VAN. Two or more species can now be covered in one visit.

The endemic disease programme addresses specific issues on health and welfare, such as wormer efficacy, and can be completed during the farm review if needed.

To apply, you must have a Single Business Identifier linked to a CPH number and 21 or more sheep.

If you've applied since June 2024, your agreement number will start with IAHW. You don't need to register and apply again, just book a review with your vet. To keep your VAN active, the vet review must be at least 10 months after your last review (not the endemic follow-up).

If you applied prior to that date, your agreement number will start with AHWR and you will need to reapply to get your review. Do this via the gov.uk website.

Continuing to speak out on Inheritance Tax

NSA is continuing to communicate its position on the government's decision to impose inheritance tax on family farms.

NSA would sign up to the government's ambition to get farming businesses to a point where they are profitable enough to pay tax, the same as all other businesses – but we are a long way from being in that position.

Having 12 months notice is not enough for farms to prepare. There is a case for tax concessions and food producers on the basis the returns on their investment are very low and food production is of national importance.

NSA is pushing for a transitional period to allow for succession planning. NSA is also concerned it will discourage farm investment – and therefore productivity and environmental investment – for fear of increasing the value of their farm. There should be tax for people buying farms as a tax dodge, but behind this lies an unintended consequence and this change doesn't target those issues the government is trying to deal with.

NSA Regions



Central

Chair: **Ed Brant**



Manager: **Situation recently filled**
Contact NSA Head Office for further information.



Cymru/Wales

Chair: **Caryl Hughes**



Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**
07976 803066
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk



Eastern

Chair: **Robert Spink**



Manager: **Nerys Wright**
07891 187643
eastern@nationalsheep.org.uk



Marches

Chair: **Anthony Warmington**



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: **Edward Adamson**



Coordinator: **Ellen Moorehead**
07513 069435
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Scotland

Chair: **Peter Myles**



Manager: **Situation vacant**
Contact NSA Head Office for further information.



South East

Chair: **Susie Parish**



Manager: **Sarah Blake**
07734 428712
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South West

Chair: **Rich Rossiter**



Manager: **Ian May**
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01291 673939
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South 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 Ireland Region

By Ellen Moorehead, Coordinator

The Annual Members' Meeting saw the appointment of Edward Adamson as Chair and William Egerton as Vice Chair.

I extend my congratulations to them both. I am confident they will provide excellent leadership and representation for our members.

The region also co-hosted a series of informative evenings with Parklands Vets offering a wealth of knowledge and practical advice pre-lambing. MSD Animal Health joined to discuss the concerning rise in Schmallenberg cases. Meanwhile, we are delighted to have supported Greenmount students in their studies.



The region is pleased to be supporting the next generation.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region had a successful start to 2025 with two well attended meetings held and plans under way for more activities this year.

The region invites you to join an insightful evening this May, run with AHDB to dispel myths about the UK's halal market. The event takes place on Tuesday, 27th May at Shipston-on-Stour Rugby Club, Warwickshire.

The region's Next Generation Shepherd competition will take place at Middle Farm, Grafton, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, on Sunday 29th June, by kind permission of NSA Next Generation Ambassador George Ellis. More details will be shared soon.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

NSA Northern Region is excited to announce the launch of a new competition at the Great Yorkshire Show this year.

The Great Yorkshire Show will host the NSA Northern Region Young Shepherd of the Future competition. Open to anyone aged 15 to 18, the competition will consist of three stages: a questionnaire, stockjudging and handling, all conducted during the show. Full details can be found in the official Great Yorkshire Show schedule.

Regional officeholders and other committee members met with MP Victoria Atkins at the end of February to discuss current policies and their impact on agriculture.

Don't forget NSA North Sheep in June – full preview on page 8 and host farm feature on pages 20-21.



NSA Northern Region met with Victoria Atkins MP.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

The region held its Annual Regional Members' Meeting in Privett, Hampshire, in early February.

The formal business included the re-election of the current office holders. Guest speaker Phil Hart, of the Hedgelaying Society, gave an informative talk on the benefits of hedgelaying, followed by an update on all things NSA by Andrea Calvesbert, Assistant to the Chief Executive.

Future events include the biennial SHWAP – Sheep Health, Wealth and Production – Conference on 14th-16th October, the NSA South East Ram Sale in September and farm walks, the first of which is in June, by kind permission of Frank Langrish of Langrish Farmers, who runs a low-input 4,000 ewe operation and was part of last year's Fabulous Fibre project.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

The sheep industry should brace itself for changing times was the message from the NSA Cymru/Wales Region Annual Members' Meeting in February.

This came from Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, Richard Irvine, Welsh Government Chief Veterinary Officer, and new HCC Chief Executive José Peralta.

All NSA officeholders were re-elected with Chair Caryl Hughes reaffirming the region's commitment to representing members' views. Caryl also joined the NSA Next Generation event at the Senedd in January highlighting the event as a valuable platform for engaging with members of the Senedd and understanding Senedd operations.

The committee is looking forward to welcoming you to NSA Welsh Sheep on Wednesday 21st May. [Full preview on page 6.](#)

NSA Eastern Region

By Nerys Wright, Manager

Members and other interested parties are invited to join a farm walk courtesy of Percy Gilman, on the afternoon of Wednesday 18th June.

Speakers Lesley Stubbings, independent sheep consultant, and Laura Eyles, Signet, have been confirmed.

The NSA Eastern Region Next Generation Shepherd Day is also having a revamp with a change in date and location. Further details will be shared soon.



Look out for shepherding competitions in your region.

NSA Central Region

By Fiona Parker, NSA Support & Activities Officer

NSA Central Region has successfully recruited a new Regional Manager and is excited to share news of the new officeholder soon.

The Annual Members' Meeting in February at Bakewell Market, Deryshire, saw Lincolnshire farmer Ed Brant welcomed as Chair and Matt Bagley as Vice Chair. James Bickerton was nominated Regional Trustee, while Matt Haydon stepped down from the NSA English Committee. Thanks to both Matts for their support.

The region will join AHDB and Mole Valley for an event with Ben Strugnell, Farm Post Mortems, on Wednesday 7th May. Time and venue to be confirmed.

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The NSA Scottish Region ARMM enjoyed an interesting visit to the Roslin Institute.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

NSA Scottish Region held its hybrid Annual Regional Members' Meeting in February at the Roslin Institute, Edinburgh.

Attendees heard about SRUC's sheep research and had a tour of the CT Unit and Green Sheep Facility.

The formal business re-appointed Peter Myles as Chair and elected Alec Telfer as Vice Chair.

Grace recently moved to a new job – watch this space for news on her successor.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

Thank you to all NSA South West Region members who made it to February's Annual Members' Meeting.

A short business meeting saw all current officeholders re-elected. Following this, attendees were treated to three interesting presentations. Will Jackson, AHDB, discussed the levy board's role in developing overseas trade opportunities. Janet Roden, Innovis, updated on the Breed for Ch4nge project and Nicola Noble from HQ spoke on NSA's wider activities.

There are plans to host a farm walk with AHDB to look at understanding our individual business carbon footprint. Don't forget NSA Sheep South West – event teaser on page 11.



Creep Feeding: A Profitable Strategy for Lamb Weaning

Effective lamb weight gain is central to maximising flock performance and overall farm profitability. Creep feeding – providing young lambs with early access to solid feed – plays a key role in improving growth rates, allowing for better feed conversion and commanding a strong market price.

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Lambs have a short window for efficient weight gain, typically from birth to around seven weeks. Milk alone cannot sustain their increasing nutritional demands, and reliance on pasture alone can slow development, particularly in poor grazing conditions. Introducing a high-quality creep ration allows lambs to develop their rumen early, leading to improved feed conversion and better slaughter weights within the desired market timeframe.

Feed In, Profit Out

Creep feeding is an investment, not an expense. Lambs that reach market weight sooner require less supplementary feeding

overall and lowers total feed costs. With earlier weaning of lambs there is also less pressure on ewes to produce milk, lowering their dietary requirements. The ewes will typically have a higher body condition score come breeding season, resulting in stronger, healthier ewes.

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A well-designed creep feeding system minimises waste, keeps feed dry, and prevents adult ewes from consuming valuable lamb rations. The Sturdy Grande Creep Feeder from Sturdy Products provides a practical solution, offering controlled access to fresh feed while protecting against contamination and weather exposure.

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References:
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2. Palacin J et al. 2011. Meta-analysis of the efficacy of melatonin implants for improving reproductive performance in sheep (2011). Spanish Journal of Agricultural Research 9(3): 730–43.
3. Scott PR et al. 2009. Melatonin treatment prior to the normal breeding season increases fetal number in United Kingdom sheep flocks. The Veterinary Journal 186(2): 188–202.
4. Hareign. 1992. The effect of implantation of lowland ewes with melatonin on the time of mating and reproductive performance. Anim. Prod. 54:31–35 0003-5561/92/00030002-00

Sustainability and quality stock is the focus at NSA Welsh Sheep 2025

NSA Welsh Sheep will be the essential technical event this May, combining a great day out with the opportunity to learn, engage and refresh.

Taking place on Wednesday 21st May at Tregoyd, near Hay on Wye in the Welsh Borders, both the setting and farm enterprises will provide interest for visitors.

The theme is sustainability with an emphasis on improving profitability and rewards for environmental gains. These topics will be key themes at the event seminars. Demonstrations will include the launch of a new product from Mayo Animal Health, major event sponsors and much more.

Helen Roberts, NSA Welsh Sheep Event Organiser, says: "This event will show how the industry can adapt to new ideas and integrate sustainability into farming systems, while still producing a quality product. I am grateful for all the support from sponsors, exhibitors, locals and the hosts. It will be a day to remember"



Penny, Sam and Will look forward to welcoming visitors.

Demonstrations

Visitors will be entertained by competitions, sheepdog trials and several interesting demonstrations. Farm tours to the higher ground of the farm, rising to 1,200ft (365m), will be a big draw offering compelling views of the Black Mountains and beyond.

The event also provides an opportunity for Penny Chantler, with sons Sam and Will Sawday, to showcase their High Country Romney flock. It's a forage only system, split over several blocks of land. The farm was featured in the last edition of *Sheep Farmer*.

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www.nationalsheep.org.uk/welshsheep
Contact Helen Roberts on 07976 803066 / 01691 654712 or email helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

There will be many other breeds on display at the event with a wide range of sheep breed society stands. Technical and policy information will be available and the opportunity to address the latest trends and politics at seminars, marketing sessions and trade stands. A Wool Hub will reflect Penny's passion for wool and her role with British Wool, showcasing innovative products and the sustainability of wool.

In addition to Mayo Health Care, auctioneers McCartneys are major event sponsors.

Competitions

Education will be an important aspect of the day with local primary and secondary school children welcomed and hosted by several exhibitors sharing the importance of Welsh sheep farming and the nutritional value of lamb.

The NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition, shearing, stockjudging and photography competitions will make a welcome return and are already attracting attention.

It's the perfect backdrop for topping up technical knowledge and skills, and to update on the political landscape while enjoying a day meeting up with friends. NSA Welsh Sheep is free for NSA members on presentation of a valid NSA membership card. Advanced tickets are available for non-members and it's free for under 16s, so be sure to encourage your friends and family to join you.



Who will be the NSA Next Generation Shepherd finalist?

Seminar timetable

11am-11.45am
Seeing sustainability through the lens of profitability

Chair: John Lloyd, NSA Policy & Technical Committee.
Speakers: Adele Jones, Sustainable Food Trust, Karen Fisher, Soil Association, and Martin Riley, Genus.

12noon-1pm
Improving sheep farming profitability and sustainability through genetics and nutrition

Chair: Caryl Hughes, NSA Wales/Cymru Region Chair.
Speakers: Janet Roden, Innovis, Mark Young, UK Agri Tech, Heather McCalman, HCC, and Will Sawday, event host.

1.15pm-2pm
How sheep health diagnostics and monitoring can boost profitability

Chair: Kate Hovers, NSA Wales/Cymru Region Trustee.
Speakers: Jonathan Mayer, MSD, Dr Hazel Wright, WVSC, and Trevor Cook, Totally Vets.

2.15pm-3pm
Can the Sustainable Farming Scheme help improve whole farm profitability and sustainability?

Chair: Jenny Layton Mills, McCartneys. **Speakers:** Mark Alexander, Welsh Government, Phil Stocker, NSA, and Sam Sawday, event host.

Cumbrian farm ready to welcome visitors to memorable NSA North Sheep

Wednesday 4th June 2025 will see the return of NSA North Sheep at the picturesque Greystoke Castle Farm near Penrith, Cumbria.

Following the success of the 2023 event, this biennial gathering will further strengthen the UK's sheep industry by bringing together farmers, breeders and industry professionals for a day of learning, networking and showcasing innovation.

Greystoke Castle Farm, farmed by John and Liz Peile and their family, serves as the ideal backdrop for this year's event. Nestled between the Lake District National Park and the Eden Valley, the farm offers diverse grazing lands and a rich farming heritage.

The family's operations include a dairy herd, beef cattle, hill sheep and a self-replenishing lowland flock of Mule and Texel cross ewes. Visitors will gain unique insights into their farming practices during the popular farm tours.

Networking

The event will feature more than 200 trade stands including breed societies and individual breeders. Attendees can explore the latest products, services and innovations in sheep farming.

Throughout the day a series of seminars and demonstrations will be held focusing on current challenges and advancements in the sheep industry. These sessions equip attendees with practical knowledge and insights to enhance their farming practices.

Following the huge success of the NSA Breakfast Club aired live at NSA Sheep Event last summer, a similar session will kick off activities at



Quality stock and far-reaching views will all be enjoyed at the event.

NSA North Sheep where attendees will be treated to a bacon sandwich and a hot drink before diving into discussion in the seminar tent.

New attractions for 2025 include a cookery theatre and an animal health area with talks and demonstrations by AHDB, SCOPS and Moredun, featuring live postmortems. View the full timetable on the event website.

There will be many highlights but a few to mention are the farm tour, speed shear competition and the sheepdog trial. The farm tour will offer an in-depth look at the farm's operations, including livestock management and grazing strategies.

Attendees will also enjoy panoramic views of the Eden Valley, making the tours both informative and visually stunning.

Competition

Starting from 3pm a speed shear competition will let visitors experience the fast-paced contest showcasing the skill and precision of top shearers as they aim for the quickest shearing time while maintaining high standards of welfare and quality.

Local Young Farmers Clubs will be assisting on the day as well as running their own stand as NSA North Sheep continues to foster the next generation of sheep farmers. Schools from the area are invited to attend and join the dedicated activities designed to inspire and educate on UK sheep farming.

Whether you're a seasoned sheep farmer or new to the industry, NSA North Sheep promises to be an invaluable experience, offering insights, networking opportunities and a celebration of the heritage and future of sheep farming in the UK.

NSA North Sheep seminars

8.45am: NSA Breakfast Club

Building resilience post BPS within your farming business

Chair: Michael Priestley, NSA Policy Manager.

Speakers: Robert Sullivan, GSC Grays, James Bush, GSC Grays, and Defra.

**Register online to receive a free bacon sandwich and hot drink at this seminar.*

11.15am

Identifying the positives of hefting: preserving the legacy

Chair: Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive.

Speakers: Jennifer Dodsworth, Oxford University, Will Rawlings, Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association, and Louise Maguire, Defra.

12.45pm

Understanding the journey to greater sustainability and net zero

Chair: Viv Lewis, NSA Northern Region Committee.

Speakers: Brian Richardson, Virgin Money, John and Liz Peile, hosts, and Trinity Agtech.

2.30pm

Marketing for the next generation

Chair: Thomas Carrick, NSA Northern Region Committee.

Speakers: Awal Fuseini, AHDB, Jane Spillman, Cranstons, and David Bowman, Hopes Auction.

North Sheep

Wednesday 4th June 2025
9AM - 5PM

Greystoke Castle Farm, Penrith
By kind permission of the Peile Family

Major Sponsor:

Come and See:

- Farm Tours
- Seminars
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- Breed Societies
- Trade Stands
- Speed Shear
- Competitions
- And much more!!

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Admission £20
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www.northsheep.org.uk

Event Organiser: Chris Adamson. Email: Chris@northsheep.org.uk Organised by the Northern Region of the National Sheep Association. A Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registration No: 57818. Registered charity in England and Wales (249215) and in Scotland (SC042855).

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NSA Highland Sheep

Get ready for an exciting day at NSA Highland Sheep, the must-attend event for sheep farmers, breeders and industry professionals.

This year's event is set to take place on Wednesday 11th June at Midfean Farm, Ardgay, Ross-shire, by kind permission of the Brooke family. Nestled on the brow of the Dornoch Firth, Midfean offers breathtaking views of the firth and surrounding hills – an idyllic setting for a full day of learning and celebration.

A packed programme includes a farm tour, insightful seminars, practical workshops, live demonstrations and a show and sale of ewe hoggs. Whether you're interested in sheepdog trials, butchery demonstrations, crook making or the best prime lamb selection, there's something for everyone.

Exhibitors

With more than 100 exhibitors already confirmed to attend, the event is set to be a hub for commercial and educational stands, showcasing everything from sheep breeds to farming equipment and services.

A highlight of the event will be the speed shear competition, with prizes and trophies up for grabs. This year will also feature the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition, giving young shepherds the chance to test their skills in sheep management, sheepdog handling and more.

Tickets are available for purchase at £20 per head, with a 50% discount for NSA members. Don't miss the opportunity to be part of this exciting event.

Midfean will provide stunning views for visitors to enjoy.



11th June 2025

Wednesday 11th June 2025
Midfean Farm, Ardgay, Ross-shire, IV24 3DL
By kind permission of the Brooke Family

FEATURES INCLUDE
OVER 100 COMMERCIAL, EDUCATIONAL, SHEEP BREED, SHEEP BREEDERS, FARMER'S MARKET & CRAFT FAIR EXHIBITOR STANDS
FARM TOUR - SHOW & SALE OF EWE HOGGS
SHEEP DOG TRIAL - SEMINARS - WORKSHOPS
EDUCATIONAL & WORKING FARM DEMONSTRATIONS
BUTCHERY & COOKERY DEMONSTRATIONS - SPEED SHEARING & STOCKJUDGING COMPETITIONS

Buy your tickets in advance online to save queuing on the day - Adults £20, NSA Members £10, Children 15 or under FREE

Further information from website or Organiser
Euan Emslie - Tel: 07902 540985 - Email: euanemslie053@gmail.com

www.highlandsheep.org.uk

Mainline Sponsors & Media Partner

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland

NSA Sheep NI is coming to the picturesque McFarlane family farm in Dungiven, County Derry, on Tuesday 1st July 2025.

This is a great opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in the heart of Northern Ireland's thriving sheep farming industry.

Nestled amidst a stunning landscape, the family farm consists of 1,200 Mule ewes predominately crossed to Texel tups. They also run a flock of traditional hill ewes suitable for the landscape. The farm will serve as a dynamic hub, showcasing the latest in the Northern Ireland sheep farming industry.



Packed schedule

The event promises a packed schedule designed to engage and educate, with something for every enthusiast, including the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition regional heat. Breed society stands will offer a wealth of information and a wide array of trade stands will showcase the latest innovations in the agricultural sector.

Beyond the educational and competitive elements, the event organisers are committed to providing a fantastic day out for the entire family. With a diverse range of catering options to enjoy while soaking in the vibrant atmosphere.

It is the ideal opportunity to connect with fellow farmers, learn from industry leaders and experience the very best of Northern Ireland's sheep farming.

More at www.sheepni.org.uk.

Admission
£10 Non-NSA Members

Tuesday 1st July 2025

Sponsored by

- Trade stands
- Breed Society Stands
- Shearing Demonstrations
- Sheepdog Trials
- Fleece Competitions
- Educational Seminars
- NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition
- Local food and drink outlets

NSA Members Free with card production

Kindly hosted by the McFarlane Family Farm, Dungiven, BT47 4QP
Event organiser - Ellen Moorehead, contact by 07513069435 or ni@nationalsheep.org.uk

Organised by NSA South West Region

Wednesday 25th June 9am – 5pm
By kind invitation of the Stanbury Family
Weston Farm, East Knowstone, South Molton, EX36 4ED

- Workshops
- Competitions
- Sheepdog Sale
- Seminars
- NSA Next Generation Young Shepherd - £1,000 prize fund
- NSA Next Generation Student Young Shepherd - £500 prize fund
- Photography Competition
- Trade & Breed Society Stands
- Demonstrations
- Fleece Competitions
- Gift of the Gavel

No Dogs on Site except Assistance dogs & those entered in the sale.
Admission - £15 Non NSA Members.
NSA Members - Free on production of card & subject to conditions.
YFC members/Students £7.50 with current card.
Under 16 - Free. Group Rates Available – details from Event Organiser
Further information from Sue Martyn.
Tel: 01409 271385. Mob: 07967 512660.
Email: suem@nationalsheep.org.uk
Registered Charity in England & Wales (249255) and in Scotland (SC042853).

Major Sponsors

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NSA Sheep South West

The countdown is on for the return of NSA Sheep South West this summer.

Taking place on Wednesday 25th June at Weston Farm, South Moulton, Devon, by kind permission of the Stanbury family, the event will be both an informative and enjoyable day out.

From browsing trade stands, to joining an insightful seminar with leading names from industry, there will be lots to see and do. A sure highlight for visitors will undoubtedly be the farm tour of the family's sheep and beef enterprises.

Host farm

The business is home to 980 ewes with breeds including Romney, North Country Mules and Suffolk Mules. The farm is also venturing into wool-shedding breeds with Easy Care and Exlana ewes. All sheep are finished off grass and herbal leys with most sheep (and cattle) overwintered outside.

In addition to the sheep flock, the farm has 145 spring calving suckler cows, mainly native breeds, including a pedigree herd of Red Ruby Devons.

There will be chances for visitors to get involved with workshops and competitions including the regional heat of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition to uncover the regional finalist to represent NSA South West in the national competition held at NSA Sheep 2026.

NSA members, children and YFC members receive free entry to the show.



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*Comparing Gallagher Lithium Energizers to Gallagher Lead-acid models.

NSA Eastern Region brings sheep farming community together

By Katie James, NSA

The tour around the UK learning more about NSA regions in *Sheep Farmer* magazine continues, introducing some familiar faces central to NSA activity.

Here some NSA Eastern Region committee members share more about themselves and their involvement with the NSA region spanning the counties of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire and Suffolk.

NSA Eastern Region, while having the fewest sheep numbers, is clearly a region of prospects, with extensive arable land and numerous opportunities for store lamb finishing utilising the available cover crop options.

Sticking together

In such a small livestock area, sheep farmers tend to stick together and support each other. Many NSA regional members will travel to meet in person for the chance to discuss sheep farming and share experiences. This sense of camaraderie and mutual assistance is a hallmark of the community, helping to navigate challenges and celebrate successes together.

Although the region does not host a large NSA event, it proudly organises the biennial NSA Eastern Region Next Generation Shepherd Day, encompassing the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. This day is not limited to young shepherds but open to all and will be returning in 2025 at a new venue. Stay tuned for the date and location.

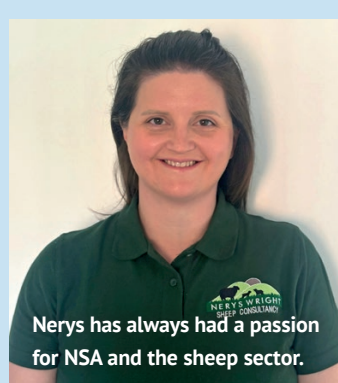
Nerys Wright Regional manager

Living in Bedfordshire and working in the sheep industry, my interest and involvement in NSA goes back some way. After having sat on the regional committee for 11 years I became NSA Eastern Region Manager in 2024 just as I was starting on my journey of self-employment. I liked the thought of staying on the committee and continuing to work with the great group of sheep farmers in the region.

The role fits in with my day-to-day work nicely and I enjoy any chance to talk about sheep. This year I will be involved in arranging committee meetings, farm walks, the region's Next Generation Shepherd Day, all while continuing to promote the fantastic work NSA does in the region and beyond.

Fact file

- Born and raised on an upland sheep and beef farm in Mid-Wales.
- Is a fluent Welsh speaker.



Nerys has always had a passion for NSA and the sheep sector.

Katie Evans Committee member

I work alongside my parents and siblings with our family's three separate sheep flocks in Norfolk. I am responsible for our flock of 600 performance recorded pedigree Lleyns producing finished and breeding stock for sale.

My dad has been a NSA member for many years, but I first got involved myself with the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme, which was an amazing experience. I came away from every session with new knowledge and ideas.

On completion of the programme, I stayed involved with the region and joined the committee. This brought the fantastic opportunity of travelling to Australia to represent NSA at the Next Generation Global Sheep Forum gathering last year.

I'd encourage any young sheep farmer to join their regional committee – it really can open many doors.

Fact file

- In addition to Lleyns the family run 800 crossbred ewes and 700 Hebrideans grazing as part of a native breed scheme.
- Next Generation Ambassador in 2022.



Katie has benefited greatly from her involvement with NSA.



Restriction zones will change as the weather warms up.

Potential changes to bluetongue restrictions

By Andrea Calvesbert, NSA

As this edition goes to press, we remain in a seasonally low vector period with no change to the bluetongue (BTV) restriction zone.

But news from Defra is eagerly awaited as to when the low vector period will end and what restrictions will come into place when it does.

Low vector period means the risk of transmission of bluetongue is now very low. As a result, there is no requirement for:

- Post-movement testing for animals moved out of the zone – provided they have a valid negative pre-movement test result.
- Vector control including the use of insecticide.
- Animals originating from the restricted zone to be slaughtered at a designated slaughterhouse.

But restriction zones are in place meaning you still have to:

- Have a licence to move animals or germinal product out of a restricted zone.
- Arrange for a pre-movement test for all animals moving out of the restricted zone unless they are moving direct to slaughter or via a dedicated slaughter market. If you are moving a pregnant female inseminated six months or more before the move, you will need a negative serology test as well as a negative PCR test.
- Comply with any post-movement testing requirements set out in your licence or restriction notice if you moved animals out of the restricted zone on or before 20th January 2025.
- Apply for a licence to freeze germinal products within the restricted zone.

The total number of cases of BTV3 is more than 240 with many of the more recent cases being in cattle. As the weather warms up, we will shift from a low vector period, increasing the risk of BTV.

NSA urges members to vaccinate their flocks in conjunction with discussions with their vet regarding the best time to vaccinate post-lambing. A new vaccination decision tool has been added to the armoury of resources exploring the financial impacts of vaccination to aid those considering BTV vaccination this year. [More on page 38.](#)



Vaccines are available for BTV.

Robert Spink Regional Chair

I run a 600 New Zealand Romney ewe flock as well as a store lamb finishing business of 2,000-3,000 lambs per year. There is also a pig enterprise finishing 1,900 pigs on a two stage system from my base at Dunhill Farm near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

I became involved with NSA as a NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2016. This initiative came at an ideal time for me and helped me to make my enterprise more commercially viable.

I stepped into the role of regional Chair at the start of 2024. Having been part of NSA Next Generation it was important to me to give something back, so I was happy to take on chairmanship of the region.

It's an exciting region to be part of with increasing numbers of sheep and good people here working hard. Our NSA committee is strong with officeholders looking forward to delivering activities for NSA members.

Fact file

- Robert's mixed enterprise covers land from 15 different landlords from its 70 acre (28ha) base.
- Credits several influential local farmers for his success today.



Robert praises the NSA Next Generation programme.

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How big a cashflow crisis will the termination of SFI leave?

With the abrupt termination of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) in England causing widespread disharmony, an NSA member gives insight into the turmoil it has created.

There is something about this case that seems particularly dispiriting and unfair. Rather than piling into SFI for the sake of securing public money, this operator tested the water first, took their time and has missed out, feeling frustrated.

They aimed to transition from what they deemed intensive farming to a low-input system and top up finances with SFI payments to aid the transition.

For decades they had run 700 North of England Mules lambed inside in March and were halfway through a transition to 500 maternal, self-replacing, wool-shedding ewes.

The plan was to reduce sheep numbers, cut inputs, drill herbal leys, fence some ground and revert arable back to grass. After three years all the Mules had been sold and it was felt payments were now needed to help. With so much change there was a genuine need to learn and experiment to understand how many sheep the system could run.

Herbal ley SFI options had been envisaged.



It's fair to say this exemplary approach could represent the type of farming revolution Defra officials had in mind when they designed the scheme. The member wanted to make informed agricultural decisions as the flock and system moved to a more environmental focus.

Four years ago, the farm received £40,000 from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). This has withered away to £7,200, leaving a £32,800 hole SFI was hopefully going to go some way towards filling.

Notes in the farm office showed an anticipated SFI income of at least £12,000, which would have helped smooth the transition. A consultant would have probably been able to find some other workable options to increase this figure, so the business would be less out of pocket.

Hindsight

The unlucky farmer said their heart goes out to those who have spent money on consultants, seed, fencing and surveys of habitats and soils to hear these outgoings may be for nothing. Several 247-acre type (100ha) farms have spent £7,000-£10,000 to qualify for a scheme that will not come to fruition.

Other SFI applications have been hamstrung by separate stewardship agreements ending, land tenure issues, probate and more – none of which is anyone's fault. Nobody missed a deadline here, but the profit and loss account does not care who is at fault.

Having spoken to dairy farmers who survived a period of no milk cheque when their milk buyer went bust, it seems cashflow challenges in farming are split into things you can and cannot influence.

Patient lenders, understanding landlords and a period of belt tightening will be required. If stock or machinery are cashed in, there could be



At least 3,000-6,000 businesses will be affected by the SFI changes.

NSA position

- NSA is leading calls for a rapid return to the next SFI scheme, making termination a short pause.
- English farmers must have a basic agri-environment scheme everyone can access. SFI has ticked this box, but there then needs to be additional demanding schemes over and above the basic offering.
- NSA member involvement in scheme co-creation must continue.
- A future scheme must be monitored to ensure applications are processed in a timely fashion and we don't end up in this position again.

important tax averaging decisions to make as businesses swing from the black to red.

Throw in the handling of the capital grant scheme and the inheritance tax rule changes and you get an increasingly frugal atmosphere across parts of the countryside, meaning contractors are putting up fewer sheds and pouring less concrete. What will this mean for the exchequer long term?

By Michael Priestley, NSA

Maintain output from 9% less farmland, says the government.

Land Use Framework consultation poses challenges for UK sheep farmers

By Michael Priestley, NSA

Maintaining lamb production from a smaller productive grassland area could be the headline challenge English sheep farmers collectively face for the next 25 years.

The government is proposing 9% of utilisable agricultural area (UAA) be used for non-agricultural purposes by 2050 in its consultation literature for the Land Use Framework.

A further 10% of UAA is earmarked for being farmed primarily for environmental and climate purposes, with the biggest loss likely to be in grassland (see table). This aims to meet climate, biodiversity, energy and housebuilding targets.

Farm productivity – defined as output from input – must lift 0.5% annually to ensure no food security decline. Defra believes this is doable and in line with the country's average productivity growth since 1973.

Multifunctionality

A key term used throughout recent Defra documents is multifunctionality in relation to how farmland is seen for all the public good it provides. The consultation stresses the more productive land will be left for farming, meaning marginal grassland is likely to come under concerted efforts to transition some of it to non-agricultural uses.

Given this, it's logical the trend for integrating sheep into arable/lowland systems will continue, with upland and hill sheep numbers continuing to decline. Stronger linkage between upland and lowland farms may also grow. There are strong soil health benefits for lowland farms from such a development, although the fragility of rural communities in the uplands is a concern for NSA, which has been emphasised to Defra.

The Land Use Framework consultation is freely available on the gov.uk website. There are 24 questions relating to planning, data capture, land

Land changes proposed in Land Use Framework.

Change of land use	Proposed size of England's total agricultural land area	Examples of changes to land use
Small changes maintaining same agricultural land use.	1% equating to 123,550 acres (50,000ha).	Margins, riparian buffer strips.
Changes in agricultural land use for food and environmental benefit.	4% equating to 914,290 acres (370,000ha).	Incorporating trees alongside food production.
Changes in agricultural land use mainly for environmental and climate benefits with limited food production.	5% equating to 1.0m acres (430,000ha).	Species rich grassland creation, peat management, short rotation coppice management.
Cease agricultural production on farmland.	9% equating to 1.9m acres (760,000ha).	Peat restoration and maintenance, heathland restoration and creation.

use change and more. It's a 12-week consultation period ending 25th April. A report is scheduled for late July, which will take points from the consultation into account.

I'd urge all members to ensure their comments are heard as this consultation will feed into the Land Use Framework, which, along with the food strategy and legally binding climate and nature targets, will be the basis for the 25-year Farming Roadmap – the outline of England's post-Brexit agricultural policy.

Remain positive

With that in mind, there are at least four reasons to remain positive:

1. You are being asked for your thoughts on the proposals set out in the Land Use Consultation.
2. The government says it will not be telling you what to do with your land.
3. Food security is prominent in Defra's documents.
4. The government is aware of the economic, environmental and animal welfare risks of offshoring food production.

Government support of £2.5bn per year for the next two years to England's farmers is being made to sound generous, but it only just matches the pillar one funding England received 10 years ago, which with inflation would be worth closer to £4bn per year today.

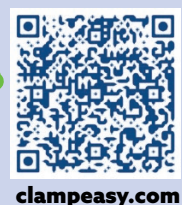
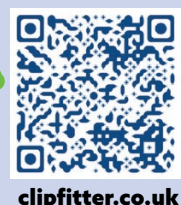
Remember, more than 74,000 acres (30,000ha) of land will be required to build the ambitious 1.5m homes in five years. There are around 5m more people in England since the last Labour government and 1.1bn more people on earth in total.

Given this, there is little doubt the onus is on livestock farmers to be more efficient, productive and profitable.

We should recognise sheep farming is already working under a heading of multifunctionality in many situations, be it nature, carbon storage or solar grazing for example.

A job well done will see sheep farming remain a highly significant part of the mix. Multifunctional farming can be serious sheep farming. [Send comments on the consultation to landuseconsultation@defra.gov.uk](mailto:landuseconsultation@defra.gov.uk) or michael@nationalsheep.org.uk.

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Sustainable agriculture policy launched but NI farmers feel neglected

By Ellen Moorehead, Regional Coordinator



The launch of Northern Ireland's Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP) marks a pivotal moment in our post-Brexit agricultural landscape.

As the Common Agricultural Policy era draws to a close, the SAP, designed through a collaborative co-design process with industry stakeholders, promises a new direction for farming in the region. While we commend the achievement of establishing a new agricultural framework, a deep sense of disappointment prevails.

Despite the SAP's comprehensive range of schemes – including support for protein crops, horticulture, and two distinct beef industry initiatives – the sheep sector has been overlooked. Not only is there no dedicated sheep scheme, but also a lack of future development in this area.

This omission is particularly perplexing given the robust state of the NI sheep industry. Market demand is rising, prices remain steady and our consumer base continues to expand.

Significant impact

The impact of this neglect is significant. Under the new SAP, sheep-only farmers are projected to lose a substantial 17% of their Basic Payment Scheme support, with no alternative avenue for recouping these losses through other available schemes. This financial hit poses a real threat to the viability of many sheep farming businesses, particularly smaller family-run operations.

Furthermore, the SAP's emphasis on farming with nature seems to contradict the actions of Daera and the Minister. Extensive upland areas, ideally suited for sheep grazing and natural

land management, are being disregarded. Sheep farming can be a highly sustainable and environmentally friendly practice, perfectly aligned with the farming with nature ethos.

Next generation

The SAP also aims to support future farming generations, yet it overlooks the unique accessibility of sheep farming for young people and new entrants. By neglecting this sector, we are inadvertently hindering the next generation of farmers and undermining the long-term sustainability of our rural communities.

The region remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting the inclusion of a dedicated sheep scheme within the SAP. We will continue to engage with policymakers to highlight the vital role of sheep farming in the region and the urgent need for equitable support. The success of the SAP, and the future of NI agriculture, rests on its ability to support all sectors including our thriving and essential sheep farming industry.



NSA Wales/Cymru Region welcomes the availability of bluetongue vaccine

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA welcomed the news that farmers in Wales will now be able to vaccinate their animals against bluetongue (BTV).

It's a positive step welcomed by many, especially as the vaccine is already permitted in England. Vaccines have been available in Wales since early March. While BTV vaccines are suppressive rather than preventative – meaning they will not stop animals becoming infected but instead reduce mortality and severity of the clinical signs – it is still great news we now have the choice they have in England to protect our flocks.

Movements

I would also like to remind members the seasonal vector low period for bluetongue only provides a short window of opportunity for livestock from the restriction zone in England to

move to Wales to live. This is subject to a number of conditions stated on the gov.wales website. Please remember movements must take place within 21 days of the pre-movement test being taken during the seasonal vector low period.

As we get nearer to the time when midges become active there will be a review of the 21-day validity of the test, and this may reduce the time allowed between sampling and movement.

Plans

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, and I met with Mark Alexander from Welsh Government on a couple of occasions to talk through the government's plans for the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) on commons in Wales. While all the detail is not currently available it is encouraging to hear the Universal Actions and payments will be available on commons, proportionate to active grazing rights.

I've also been involved in several SFS meetings during the past few months where the Universal Actions have been discussed in more detail, along with the scheme as a whole.

NSA has taken the decision to formally hand back control of the Welsh Commons Forum to the current committee, who will go on to decide how the forum will operate going forward.



NSA Scottish Region highlights the effects of unintended consequences

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



Recent announcements of £46m in additional capital support for Scottish agriculture in 2025 and 2026 and £14m dedicated to flexible capital grants under the Future Farming Investment Scheme are welcomed by NSA Scottish Region.

But members have been on the back foot over recent years due to uncertainty and highly fluctuating variable costs.

Navigate change

A recent NSA Scottish Region committee meeting made it clear our farmers must be equipped fully to navigate upcoming policy changes or the already declining national flock will suffer more irreversible damage at the hands of poor communication and unintended policy consequences.

The region has written to Jim Fairlie, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, on the issue of sea eagles to invite him and other governmental officials to the Argyllshire area to discuss the acknowledged unintended consequences of reintroductions and to work together to find practical and workable solutions.

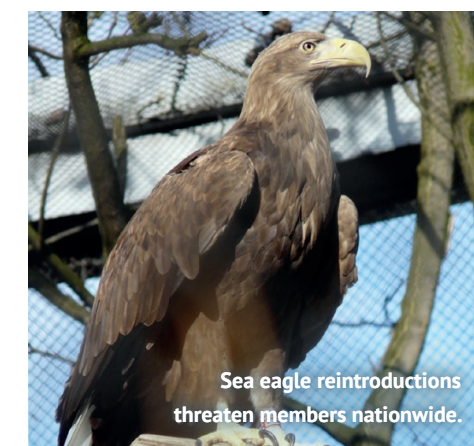
Rural livelihoods

Currently, the livelihoods of our members who farm sheep in the affected areas are being decimated and the predation is having an adverse effect on their farm business viability and mental health. The impact of these apex predators on our sheep farms goes far beyond lamb predation; the serious impacts are felt across the entire flock.

Having fewer female replacements coming into the flock slows genetic progress and causes older, less fit ewes being kept on hills. Current efforts to manage this ongoing man-made catastrophe have proven to be underfunded, under resourced and completely out of touch.

This is the case before birds naturally relocate to other areas of Scotland.

The welcome announcement made by First Minister John Swinney that he would not be entertaining a legal reintroduction of lynx was a rare positive glimmer for our industry, despite failed illegal attempts to do so.



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NSA Westminster trip puts spotlight on UK farming legislation



The unintended consequences of well-meaning legislation was a reoccurring theme throughout a two-day trip to Westminster undertaken by young sheep farmers in February.

NSA selected 10 keen young farmers from around the UK to travel to London to find out more about the politics of sheep farming and the impact rules and regulations created in Westminster have, not just on individual farms, but throughout the food chain.

Following a tour of the House of Commons and House of Lords, NSA President Lord Inglewood hosted a roundtable discussion in which the Next Generation representatives were invited to ask questions of Daniel Zeichner (Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs), Alistair Carmichael (Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee) and a trio of civil servants (led by John Powell of Defra).

Conversation

Joanne Briggs, NSA Operations Director, guided the Next Generation group over the two days. She says: "The conversation ranged widely, including points about graziers finding it difficult to get government support because they didn't own land and farmers already in Higher Level Stewardship feeling penalised for previous good work by being

excluded from the Sustainable Farming Incentive."

In the evening the group enjoyed British lamb as the centrepiece of a meal at the Farmers Club at Whitehall, where they were joined for the evening by Tim Farron MP who spoke about the role of opposition MPs.

Agreements

A visit to the New Zealand High Commission near Trafalgar Square to speak to government spokespeople and New Zealand Beef & Lamb representatives compared how legislation and free trade agreements are thrashed out on the other side of the world and affected sheep farmers there.

The group were fascinated by the insight into sheep farming as a truly global business, with export markets around the world a key component for both UK and New Zealand producers.

A session at Marks & Spencers headquarters focused on the domestic trade and how supermarkets use existing legislation around animal welfare and climate change mitigation as the baseline for assurance and accreditation to market food to consumers.

At least half the group met their local MP while in Westminster. Emily Elnaugh, who travelled from Suffolk for the two-day event says: "I learned a



This was the third successful trip to Westminster.

lot and I'm grateful for the opportunity. I followed up the meeting with my MP with an invitation for him to come and draw finished lambs with me and see how we produce high quality stock for the food chain."

NSA thanks Lord Inglewood for sponsoring the visit to the Palace of Westminster and the many contributors who gave their time so generously.



Put your shepherding skills to the test this summer.

Join us at an NSA event this year



NSA Welsh Sheep Wednesday 21st May 2025
Tregoe Farm, Brecon. By kind permission of Penny Chantler and sons.

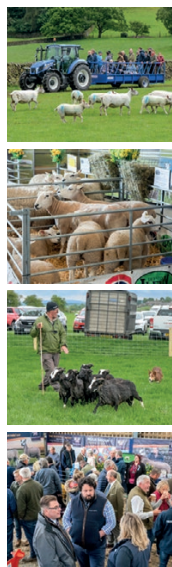
NSA North Sheep Wednesday 4th June 2025
Greystoke Castle Farm, Penrith, Cumbria. By kind permission of the Peile family.

NSA Highland Sheep Wednesday 11th June 2025
Midfearn Farm, Ardgay, Ross-shire. By kind permission of the Brooke family.

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 NSA Field Days, farm walks and more – check *Sheep Farmer* magazine, the NSA website and other NSA communications for further updates.



Show off your shepherding skills

Calling all young sheep farmers. Don't miss your chance to compete against fellow young shepherds at one of the six regional NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions taking place this summer.

NSA Eastern, Marches, Northern Ireland, Scottish, South West and Cymru/Wales region will all hold regional events to find qualifiers for the national finals of the competition taking place at NSA Sheep Event next year.

Find out more about the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition by visiting www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk or www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.



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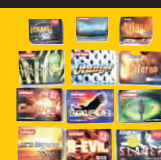
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North Country Mules remain the predominant breed on farm.

Forward-thinking Cumbrian farm to be showcased at NSA North Sheep

By Katie James, NSA

An opportunity to showcase their stock, while bringing together the farming community for an enjoyable day out, was a good incentive for Cumbrian farmers John and Liz Peile to accept the invitation to host this summer's NSA North Sheep.

From their home at Greystoke Castle Farm near Penrith, the couple – with their children Tom, Jack and Lucy – will welcome visitors from across Northern England and beyond to the event.

"We are sociable people and are proud of our farming, so are really looking forward to being able to share that with visitors," comments Liz.

Of all the event attractions, the farm tour will surely be one of the main highlights giving an insight into the family's mixed upland farm, which forms part of the well-known Greystoke Estate.

Pregnant ewes are fed silage, saving better grazing for after lambing.

John and Liz have been tenants of the farm for just over three years having initially moved to the farm 11 years ago to contract farm alongside estate owners the Howard Family. "The contract farming worked well," explains John. "We had suckler cattle and 2,000 ewes. "When the former estate owner passed it to his son who was less interested in farming we had the chance to take the farm on a tenancy. Originally, we were offered a 10-year agreement but, keen to secure an enterprise offering more security and opportunity for the whole family, we were able to negotiate to agree a 20-year tenancy."

Infrastructure

To help purchase further stock and machinery, the family sold their nearby small farm. These funds helped improve the farm's infrastructure with several new buildings erected – including a dairy cow shed and parlour to house the farm's new 150 dairy herd – an enterprise now managed by Tom.

"Dairy has been our diversification" says Liz. "We knew we had to look at other enterprises to act as some assurance against diminishing farm payments and with Tom's enthusiasm for milking this made the most sense."

John adds: "We previously got a good basic payment but it's subsequently gone. The dairy helps replace that and provides a good year-round income compared to the sheep and sucker income, which can be quite seasonal."



The family are looking forward to welcoming visitors to their home.

The focus of NSA North Sheep will of course be the farm's flock of 300 Swaledales, 600 North of England Mules and 400 Texel cross ewes. Tom and Jack also run a flock of pure Texels crossed with a Beltex tup to produce breeding rams.

Lambing started outside in early March with the pure Texel flock, then the main flock followed at the end of March thorough to the end of April. Until this time ewes were kept far away from the farm's 700 acres (280ha) of good grazing land and are instead run on rougher grazing higher up on the farm. John comments: "We feed the ewes silage from January onwards to preserve the grazing land for post lambing. They will also get some cake from mid-February until lambing starts."

Pasture

In total the farm covers 2,200 acres (890ha), including the better permanent pasture as well as 700-800 acres (280-320ha) of mowing land and a similar area of very rough grazing rising to 1,100ft (335m) at its highest point.

Around 350 acres (140ha) of grass is cut three times for pit silage each spring and summer.

"We will also make 200-300 round bales of hay each year and then straw is bought in for winter as needed. We like to use rushes as bedding as it has been excellent when put through the straw chopper, but it's not always easily available due to the requirement for dry weather to harvest – something we've not had a lot of over recent summers," Liz adds.

The forage work is all completed by contractors. At other times family members, who each have their own focus on the farm, are supported by a small team of local students and part-time workers. Liz explains: "Tom focuses on the dairy, Jack on the suckler cattle and sheep, and then Lucy, who is a teacher, comes home to milk, help with calves and help at lambing time.

"But with the seasonality of the work, everyone comes together to help across the enterprises when needed."

Sustainability

With all the farm being permanent pasture no other crops are grown, but as John and Liz look to what support options could work for the farm the couple are not dismissing a change to this in the coming years.

Liz says: "We were looking at the Sustainable Farming Incentive – it doesn't work for a lot of our land currently in Higher Level Stewardship, but schemes like this do look interesting. It wouldn't necessarily work for us now but it's something to consider in the future.

"Some support schemes look like they do offer interesting opportunities but with them will come challenges."

John and Liz both recognise overcoming and adapting to challenges can help a farm learn and improve. Issues such as flock health would be an example of this.

John says: "We never had ticks on the farm until two years ago. We experienced some lamb losses due to tick fever. We do dip the sheep but with ticks moving further south we might have to look at other tick treatments."



Greystoke Castle Farm is also home to a growing dairy herd.

Lameness caused by footrot has also been an issue for the farm but is being overcome thanks to building a new footbath. John adds: "We got a grant to build a large footbath holding 50 sheep at a time. Now every time sheep are brought into the handling pens they are run through the bath with zinc, copper and formalin. This is definitely helping."

Adaptation

Another adaptation for the farm this year is to introduce creep feeding earlier. "We hope it means we can get lambs away a bit sooner," John comments. Any lambs not sold by mid-September will be fed to finish.

The farm is self-sufficient producing its own gimmer replacements with 300 additional Texel cross gimmer lambs sold – and all other finished lambs sold mostly through Hopes Auction at Wigton, Cumbria.

John has had a positive relationship with this market all his farming life and says: "It was our local auction before we moved here and so we stayed with them. I've also been on the Board of Directors there since 2015 and I've been the Chair of the Board of Directors for the past two years."

It's therefore not surprising to hear John and

Liz consider the market as a crucial part of rural life. "The market is so important socially not just as a place of business," says Liz. "Hopes Auction has recently tried to encourage this further by starting themed sales such as the Lad's Night Out, a tup sale held in August attracting a lot of people to socialise, enjoy a BBQ and a drink. It also holds events such as charity carol evenings."

The family enables the community to come together too. John says: "We enjoy hosting farm walks and have welcomed groups from local young farmers to internationals. Visitors enjoy the farm and its stunning views. We hope for a clear day for NSA North Sheep to showcase it to you."

[See page 8 for an NSA North Sheep preview.](#)

Farm facts

- A 2,200 acre (890ha) mixed livestock farm including 1,500 ewes, 150 dairy cows and 180 suckler cows and followers.
- The livestock enterprises produce finished lambs, breeding gimmer lambs, stock rams and store cattle.
- Greystoke Castle Estate is also home to a commercial shoot, a racehorse stables and a charcoal producer, with the castle set to become a wedding venue in the future.

"We are sociable people and are proud of our farming, so are really looking forward to being able to share that with visitors."

Liz Peile

The event tour will offer amazing views.



The Brooke family's quality flock will be a highlight of the event.

Tradition and innovation on display at NSA Highland Sheep

By Katie James, NSA

Few farms could be a more fitting site for the return of NSA Highland Sheep this summer.

Taking place for the first time since 2019, the event will be held at Midfearn Farm, Ardgay, Ross-shire, hosted by the Brooke family and farm manager Neil Shaw.

Set against the stunning backdrop of the spectacular Struie Hill, with breathtaking views stretching along the Dornoch Firth and up to the Kyle of Sutherland, the farm will showcase best practice and quality stock at the event.

Midfearn Estate amounts to approximately 13,500 acres (5,460ha) in total, with the majority

being hill ground leaving around 250 acres (100ha) in arable/grassland. The farm has been home to sheep for the past century but more recent times have seen a change to the flock as the farm pursued increased efficiency.

Historic flock

Neil explains: "The farm is home to a historic Scottish Blackface flock dating back to the early 1900s. We began a move to a Cheviot flock almost 20 years ago.

"This began by purchasing our first North Country Cheviot gimmers from Lairg Market, Sutherland. The flock has now grown to 350 Cheviots with just under 200 Cheviot and Suffolk



Neil Shaw, farm manager.

cross ewes too. Of the original Blackie flock, 150 remain grazing the top of the hills."

All Cheviot ewes are kept pure to produce replacement gimmer lambs with males sold as stores through Dingwall & Highlands Mart straight off their mothers at weaning in the second week of August. "We don't have enough fields to finish lambs," Neil adds.

Increased efficiency

All ewes are scanned at the end of January to lamb outdoors in April. Neil is pleased with this year's scanning results. "We scanned at 170% for the Cheviot and Suffolk ewes, and 124% for the pure Blackface ewes," he says. "Scanning percentages have increased over the years. We have fewer sheep now than we used to but are producing the same number of lambs. The change of breed means they are also of higher value."

To ensure ewes are in top condition ahead of tupping, they are bolused in autumn if needed and offered pre-tupping lick buckets. Ewes are moved on to high energy lick buckets in December until lambing. Ad lib silage is offered if required and an 18% protein ewe roll is added into the diet six weeks pre-lambing for all twins and triplets. Singles will be offered concentrates three weeks pre-lambing.

Neil adds: "It is so important to ensure good colostrum quality so adding in the extra nutrition we find makes a difference."

Neil is supported in his farm work by colleague Edgar Wylie with further part time staff supporting the team during lambing.

All ewes are lambed outside, apart from triplets that are housed with the single-bearing ewes grazing close to make adoption easier. Tup lambs are ringed, "Unless there is the odd pure Cheviot with a bit of character about him," Neil adds. "On those occasions we might keep him to grow on and use."

Twin lambs are offered creep feed to help improve weaning weights with Neil also believing it helps take the pressure off the ewe. He says: "It stops the ewes from being constantly drained of milk. It's another expense but for us it outweighs the potential difference if they are not fed."

Selective breeding

The flock's health plan is quite simple with only clostridial and pasteurella vaccines given. Neil explains: "We are lucky to have not had significant problems with abortion and through selective breeding – including the removal of persistent offenders – lameness has really been reduced. Therefore, at the moment, we do not feel the need to vaccinate further.

"We just try and keep everything as healthy and active as we can. We have a good working relationship with our vet. She's always happy to take a phone call and pass on advice whenever needed. She keeps us right."

All sheep are dipped annually with lambs treated with a spot on treatment for ticks from six weeks of age onwards. "On some of the higher ground with a lot of heather we can find a lot of ticks but the lower ground has not presented any issues," he adds.

As Neil considers the future for the farm's flock, he will now work with estate owner Jock Brooke following the sad passing of Charlie Brooke who died in 2024.

Jock says: "Going forward, the main thing for us is to run the farm as best we can with what we have and produce high quality, healthy livestock. When my father took over the estate in the 1980s the farm was not in great shape, with too little resources put in. Since then gradual improvements have been made so there is some pressure to not let that work and effort be in

Midfearn is home to a historic Blackface flock.



“My father enjoyed seeing healthy livestock in the fields here. He took pride from having a tidy, well-maintained farm.”
Jock Brooke

vain." Charlie shared Neil's enthusiasm for healthy, productive livestock.

Jock continues: "My father enjoyed seeing healthy livestock in our fields. He took pride from having a tidy, well-maintained farm. The farm business was not just about crunching numbers for him, the altruistic side of farming was equally as important and the sense of community it creates. Of course there were challenges over the 40 years he was in charge but that never deterred his enthusiasm for the farm."

While the opportunity to view the farm's quality sheep will no doubt be a highlight for NSA Highland Sheep visitors, the event farm tour will also showcase the farm's cattle. The operation has grown from 60 Simmental cows to 105 Aberdeen Angus cross breeding cows sired by purebred Aberdeen Angus bulls, producing premium stores. Neil says: "Most of the stores are sold at 12-13 months old at good weights so future buyers have the weight already on board to finish them."

Visitors will also have the chance to learn more about the farm's history and Charlie's entrepreneurial diversifications.

Hydro power

When Charlie took over the estate his father gave him the copper cable from the old 1921 hydro scheme, which had fallen into disrepair. Upon selling the cable he used the funds to start a successful fish farm, which was the core operation for 30 years. During that time, he was also an early adopter of renewables, first building windfarms and then two new hydro schemes.

He has since come full circle and was able to rebuild the original 1921 hydro and restore it to full working condition, blending century old technology with modern innovation.

Jock says: "This diversification has been a great help allowing the farm to improve other infrastructure to enhance farm efficiencies, from being able to build a new shed or replace a piece of machinery. This is helped by the revenue renewables bring in."

Having worked on the farm for the past 37 years, including 19 years as farm manager, Neil has witnessed many of the farm's recent innovations and is clearly proud of what will be on display for visitors to NSA Highland Sheep. He says: "Midfearn is a true showcase of agricultural diversification at its best. From modern wind farms and meticulously restored hydro schemes to thriving flocks and herds, the estate beautifully combines tradition and innovation. A visit here is an unforgettable experience, with a perfect blend of history, sustainability and exceptional livestock."

Jock concludes: "The sense of community coming with farming was very important to my father. For this reason we are looking forward to welcoming visitors to our home in June."

[NSA Highland Sheep preview on page 10.](#)



Charlie Brooke, right, passed away last year.

Farm facts

- The Brooke family has farmed Midfearn for more than 130 years.
- Home to 650 predominantly Cheviot and Suffolk cross ewes, as well as a historic flock of Scottish Blackface.
- Also known for its renewable energy production from several hydro schemes and a wind farm.



The view of the Dornoch Firth will provide a stunning backdrop.

Marketing round up

Here NSA invites the levy and marketing boards to update members on efforts to promote and sell sheep meat and wool across the UK and beyond.

Educating the consumer on the wonders of wool

Influencers and promotional materials are a key part of the marketing strategy to boost consumer awareness, says British Wool.

This is all designed to increase front-end demand for British wool rich products and improve the price of members wool.

Graham Clark, Marketing Director at British Wool, comments: "We have been focused on two main areas – increasing the number of brands using British wool in their products via the licensing scheme and increasing our brand awareness among consumers. Public relations play a crucial part as it allows us to target a wide audience through our activity. During this time, we have had coverage across different national publications – such as *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *Financial Times* – as well as regional press coverage."

Working with influencers is also key. "Influencers can boost consumer awareness dramatically and we have been fortunate to work with Shaun the Sheep, Patrick Grant from the Great British Sewing Bee and the comedian Joe Lycett," Mr Clark adds.

This complements other consumer outreach by British Wool. Mr Clark explains: "We don't just target the consumer through public relations, we also use social media, exhibitions and events, working with our licensee partners and the British Wool online shop where sales have been increasing."

The British Wool licensing scheme has also seen growth with more brands purchasing fully traceable wool at a price premium. "It is crucial British Wool continues to work with brands to encourage them to use British wool in their products, not just in the UK but overseas, which bodes well for the future," says Mr Clark.

This diversity of marketing methods and number of brands on the licensing scheme help push the British Wool brand to new audiences who are increasingly looking for more sustainable options when making purchasing decisions.



Shaun the Sheep is helping influence British wool uptake.



International trade shows promote Scotch Lamb worldwide.

QMS showcases Scotch Lamb at Gulfood 2025

QMS has once again highlighted the quality of Scotch Lamb at Gulfood, one of the world's largest annual food and beverage trade exhibitions.

The event in Dubai attracted more than 135,000 visitors from 195 countries and saw significant trade activity across global markets.

The Middle East has imported an average of £648m worth of sheep meat in recent years, demonstrating the significant potential for Scottish exporters looking to expand in the region.

Throughout the four-day event, QMS engaged with international buyers at its shared stand with AHDB, offering tastings of premium Scotch Lamb prepared by expert chefs. National Chef Gary Maclean also took centre stage in the Scottish Pavilion, demonstrating the versatility of Scotch Lamb to interested buyers.

The showcase underlined the exceptional taste, provenance and sustainability credentials of Scotch Lamb, reinforcing its position as a premium red meat product globally.

A key highlight of QMS's participation was the exclusive Scottish Development International reception, where more than 200 buyers gathered to sample Scotch Lamb.

QMS extended invitations to major wholesalers and retailers across the region, ensuring key decision-makers experienced the unique flavour and high quality of Scotch Lamb firsthand. The strong presence at Gulfood underscores the commitment to expanding Scotland's red meat exports and building lasting trade relationships.

Gordon Newlands, QMS Brand Development Manager, says: "Exports are a big opportunity for Scotland's red meat supply chain. Last year, we set ourselves the objective of making Scotland the choice for premium red meat as part of our five-year strategy. At Gulfood, we have been showcasing the finest quality Scotch Lamb and emphasising its highly valued attributes in the premium export market."

International trade shows remain a crucial part of the QMS export strategy. Following successful participation at events such as SIAL in Paris, QMS continues to strengthen its presence in key global markets with a series of events planned across Europe and the Middle East this year.

Consumers in Northern Ireland hear more about the benefits of NIFQA lamb

Lamb continues to feature prominently in LMC's Good Honest Food campaign, especially through recent Mother's Day and St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

The multi-platform campaign encouraged consumers to choose lamb for their gatherings, with a range of recipes and cooking tips available.

An independent tracking survey commissioned by LMC revealed consumer awareness of Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) lamb has reached its highest level (68%) since the campaign launched in 2020 with 70% of consumers reporting the campaign influenced them to buy NIFQA lamb.

Earlier this year, the commission presented at the NSA Northern Ireland Region Annual Members' Meeting where representatives focused on NIFQA, sheep trade and LMC's work on sustainability initiatives and marketing.

The commission plans to roll out another major series of events as part of its education programme featuring 500 school cookery demonstrations, enhancing access to lamb in schools and providing training for teachers to cook with lamb during practical sessions.

LMC is an active member of Northern Ireland's Sheep Task Force aiming for equitable proportion of the support available through Daera's new

LMC

Sustainable Agriculture Programme. The task force has also called for better animal health and welfare measures, sustainable land management and biodiversity initiatives, capital investment, genetic improvements and a dedicated sheep research programme.

With the right support, LMC says it sees significant opportunities to collaborate with industry partners to achieve profitable and sustainable outcomes for the sheep sector at every level.



LMC Chair Joe Stewart with champion prime lambs.

Campaign helps secure British lamb's position at the table

AHDB's Let's Eat Balanced campaign kicked off 2025 with a strong start in January, reaching millions of shoppers through a wide range of platforms.

The campaign was on TV, cinema, Netflix, video-on-demand, social media and in-store, reinforcing the sustainability, nutritional benefits and great taste of British lamb, emphasising its role in a healthy balanced diet.

As consumer interest in food origins and production continues to grow, AHDB says Let's Eat Balanced is building trust in British agriculture by showcasing the environmentally friendly practices of British farmers. Through engaging social media content – including videos of farmers – the campaign brings consumers closer to the farm, highlighting the dedication and resilience behind producing world-class food.

Let's Eat Balanced plays a role in protecting long-term consumer attitudes towards naturally produced British red meat and dairy, reinforcing their place in a nutritious, balanced diet.

Following its success in January, the campaign returned in March continuing to promote high-quality British lamb, beef and dairy. AHDB encourages levy payers to engage with the message by sharing campaign content on social media. [More at www.ahdb.org.uk/letseatbalanced](http://www.ahdb.org.uk/letseatbalanced).



In-store promotions were part of AHDB's campaign.

Welsh Lamb marketing strikes a chord with consumers

Months of marketing plans and promotions have resulted in positive results for HCC's latest Welsh Lamb campaign.

The aim of the Uniquely Welsh campaign was to build on the excellent results of 2023 efforts by positioning Welsh Lamb as sustainable, nutritious and tasty. The focus remained on its natural production in Wales and on the people who produce it as experts in their field.

The results were encouraging as consumer brand awareness increased in both Wales and England, from an already high 90% to 93% and from 65% to 72% respectively.

Consumers who lack knowledge of the attributes of Welsh Lamb and have the propensity to purchase thereafter were proactively targeted. For example, in South East England, advertising was planned within a five-mile radius of specific retail stores where stock was available to purchase. In addition, retail data was used to run TV advertising targeting high quality meat purchasers across households with Sky subscriptions.

Welsh Lamb was also consistently promoted across social media during the campaign period of August-November, and in online publications such as *Men's Health*, *The Guardian*, *Radio Times* and *Mail Online*. The TV advert – featuring a mid-Wales farmer, a sheepdog and breathtaking views – was broadcast on S4C and ITV.

Pip Gill of HCC says: "As one campaign ends, the planning for the next begins. We are committed to building on the success of the 2024 campaign, keep continuity in messaging to enable the brand to really embed itself in consumers' subconscious and place the spotlight on Welsh farmers."



The five tools of business resilience: Future Farm Resilience Fund learnings

By Josh Brock, ADAS

Five key management tools have been highlighted from the most resilient farms ADAS visited as part of the Future Farming Resilience Fund.

Since 2022, ADAS has delivered free business advice to hundreds of farmers in England to aid businesses in adapting to the reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and to become more resilient.

It's a cliché but if you don't know where you are going, how do you know how to get there? Having a business plan acts like a roadmap for the business, setting clear goals, identifying strategies and outlining steps to achieve them.

For a farming business, a solid business plan covers areas like profitability, technical performance, market strategies, resources and risk management. It helps identify strengths and weaknesses and understand the opportunities and challenges. You can then make informed decisions and adjust to changing conditions.

Roadmap

Business planning improves efficiency, supports long-term growth and enhances the farm's ability to withstand external pressures, such as market fluctuations or climate variability. Regularly updating the business plan keeps the farm adaptable and responsive, fostering resilience in an unpredictable agricultural environment.

Financial recording involves systematically tracking all income, expenses, assets and liabilities. Maintaining accurate financial records is essential for monitoring profitability, managing costs and ensuring legal and tax compliance. It allows you

to identify financial trends, make data-driven decisions and assess the viability of different activities. Strong financial records support loan applications, tax reporting and audits.

By understanding your financial position you can consider new business opportunities, prepare for unexpected challenges, invest wisely and maintain cashflow during tough seasons. Consistent and accurate financial recording is a critical foundation for building a resilient and sustainable farming operation.



Business planning provides a clear roadmap for your farm goals.

Cashflow forecasting is the process of estimating future cash inflows and outflows over a specific period. It helps predict seasonal income variations, plan for major expenses and ensure there is enough liquidity to cover operational needs. Timely financial decisions, such as scheduling equipment purchases or adjusting production can be made and they help identify potential cash shortages in advance, allowing proactive measures to avoid financial strain. By providing a clear view of future finances, cashflow forecasting strengthens a farm's ability to

navigate uncertainties and maintain operational stability.

Succession planning is the process of preparing for the transfer of farm ownership and management to the next generation or new leaders. It ensures continuity and protects the ongoing trading business, as well as the legacy of the family. A well-structured succession plan clarifies roles, reduces conflict and outlines the legal and financial aspects of the transfer.

This planning helps prevent disruptions during transitions and ensures assets, knowledge and expertise are passed on smoothly.

Review

Benchmarking involves comparing farm technical performance against industry standards or similar operations. Key areas measured may include productivity, costs, profitability and resource efficiency. It helps identify strengths, weaknesses, highlight areas for improvement and opportunities for development. It also provides insights into best practices and allows you to set realistic goals. By understanding how the farm compares to other similar farms, you can adapt strategies to remain competitive and resilient, even in the face of changing economic, environmental or market conditions.

In an ever-evolving agricultural landscape, financial resilience is the key to long term success. By adopting business planning, financial recording, cashflow forecasting, succession planning and benchmarking, you can navigate challenges with clarity and confidence, seize new opportunities and enhance overall business sustainability.

ADAS offers further advice at www.adas.co.uk.

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

Lameness in Sheep

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

Hoof Care and Footbaths

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

New Alternative

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

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

Comparative trials

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

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

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

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

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Recordkeeping: an invaluable tool when selecting replacements for your flock

vetPartners

Taking the time to keep records on ewe and lamb performance will pay dividends when it comes to selecting your breeding sheep in future, says Dawn Bowness of Clevedale Farm Vets, North Yorkshire.

"Although recordkeeping is not commonplace on all sheep farms, it has the potential to become an invaluable tool. A lot of desirable flock traits have a genetic component and if you don't have any records to help choose which animals to keep, it's going to be impossible to improve your flock," she explains. "You can't breed out a problem if you can't remember which sheep had it, so keeping records can have a big impact."

According to Dr Bowness the traits to monitor in ewes include milk yield, mothering ability and lambing ease, while the important traits to look for in lambs include vigour and growth rates.

Productivity

"Every management decision matters and every sheep has to perform, especially in the current climate. Over time, you can make a massive difference to your flock's productivity if you record and carefully select replacements. You want to be slowly breeding problems out, rather than increasing the problems by keeping replacements from underperforming ewes," says Dr Bowness.

"Electronic identification (EID) tags are the cornerstone of recordkeeping and matching lambs to ewes as soon as you can is a great starting point. This doesn't need to be done immediately, but it's best to tag them while you can still marry them up to their mums. Thereafter,

the first recordkeeping step I'd encourage is recording eight-week lamb weights."

This weight provides a great indication of the dam's mothering ability and whether her offspring should be kept for breeding.

"A lamb is hugely dependent on milk up to about eight weeks old and most of its nutrition comes from this. So lamb weight is a good reflection of the dam's milk yield and mothering ability, as well as the direct growth rate potential of the lamb itself," she explains.



Using management tags can aid record keeping.

Weights can be used to draw up an initial shortlist of ewe lambs worth keeping as replacements, with twin lambs preferable.

"It's also beneficial to weigh lambs again at weaning to see how they have performed when they're fending for themselves more and to see if the lambs in your replacement shortlist are still performing well," she adds.

Dr Bowness recommends selecting 25% more ewe lamb replacements than required in case something goes wrong with the lambs you've

earmarked as replacements. This avoids keeping lambs from under-performing ewes to make up numbers. "It also gives you wriggle room to remove lambs from the shortlist if they stop performing well," she adds.

Monitoring

Adoption of a management tag system is the easiest way to monitor and record ewe performance at lambing time, says Dr Bowness.

"You can tag any ewes giving you a problem such as a difficult lambing, having mastitis or repeatedly going lame. You then know to not keep her lambs because she – and her offspring – have the potential for future problems," she explains.

Many farmers using management tags are effectively running two flocks, with replacements only kept from one.

"You will want to use very different sires in the two flocks, but the sheep can move between them. A ewe might be in the slaughter flock, but she might have a couple of really good years and move back to the maternal flock. Equally, a ewe in the maternal flock might prolapse one year or repeatedly go lame meaning she moves down to the slaughter flock."

Management software, linking to EID tags, can be used to record further information at lambing time. "The EID set-ups are affordable now and there are grants available," says Dr Bowness. "What you record can be as simple or as complicated as you like – it depends on the needs of the flock."

Records will also help if there is a health problem in the flock, because every piece of information provides more detail. "It's near impossible to remember an individual sheep's health history without records," she concludes.

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Utilising red and white clover to finish lambs and reduce feed costs



A Farming Connect trial has allowed father-and-son Glyn and Chris Davies to experiment with finishing lambs without concentrates and reduce feed costs for pregnant ewes.

"Including red and white clover in grass swards has made some big differences for the Davies family at Awel Y Grug in Powys," explains Rhodri Jones of Farming Connect. "Previously, concentrate feed was one of the biggest inputs to produce lamb from their 700 Texel cross Mule ewes, but cost and an ambition to reduce the flock's carbon footprint prompted a rethink."

"Having now grown clover for three years, and convinced of its benefits, they intend to increase the acreage of red and white varieties across the farm."

Out competing

In 2023, 11 acres (4.3ha) of red clover and ryegrass and seven acres (2.75ha) of white clover and ryegrass were established. This was a tricky season for establishment with wet conditions resulting in a two-month gap between ploughing and sowing the seed. The delay resulted in an ingress of creeping buttercup, chickweed and meadow grasses, but once the clover established it largely out-competed the weeds. The leys have since been rotationally grazed and cut for silage.

Chris says "The wet season delayed target cutting dates and reduced yield and quality in the first two cuts of red clover. But introducing clover into the swards has been beneficial for sheep margins and soil health."

"Before we grew clover, we fed pregnant ewes 20t of concentrates but this year we are down to

4.5t of sugar beet pulp and 5.5t of sheep nuts." At housing, ewes are separated into three groups to compare their performance on the clover silages and permanent pasture forage. This year, twin-bearing ewes fed red clover silage are being supplemented with a total of 10.5kg/head of sugar beet over a five-week period compared to a total of 17.9kg/head of an 18% protein concentrate fed over a seven-week period in previous years. Twin bearing ewes on the white clover silage are receiving a total of 10.5kg/head of the 18% concentrate over a five-week period.

Independent sheep specialist Kate Phillips formulated the new feeding rations and recommended trough space be increased to six inches per ewe. This change, combined with silage quality, has transformed ewe behaviour. "I have never seen them so content, lying down and chewing their cud," Chris says.

The business is not only capturing feed savings at lambing but for lamb finishing too. For two successive years, concentrates have been eliminated entirely from lamb finishing. "It is the first time we have ever been able to do that here," says Chris.

Pre-weaning gains

Lambs also perform better pre-weaning. "Ewes were producing more milk without concentrates than our ewes who were grazing permanent pasture with supplementary concentrates," he reports.

Before introducing clover the cost of finishing had almost become financially unsustainable. "We were almost better off selling lambs as stores. The quantity of meal they were consuming didn't make it worthwhile to finish them," adds Chris.



Grazing clover has reduced concentrate feed requirements.

"Lambs don't quite achieve the sale prices they did on concentrates but savings outweigh the dip in income."

Reduced inputs

The benefits of clover extend beyond feed savings with a significant reduction in the volume of nitrogen fertiliser used. In 2024, 20kg N/ha was applied to both clover fields in April and another 40kgN/ha to the white clover ley after the first silage cut. In September, 40kg of phosphate per hectare and 60kg of potassium per hectare were spread on the red clover, after the second cut to replace offtake from the silage cuts.

Nutrients in the form of farmyard manure were also applied to the red and white clover fields during the growing season.

When the farm was entirely down to permanent pasture, 20kg N/ha of bagged fertiliser was applied annually to the grazing fields and 50kg N/ha to the silage fields.

Rotational grazing coupled with regularly measuring swards with a plate meter has been key to clover performance. "The farm grows more than it did when we set stocked," says Chris.

Rotational grazing and monitoring is also important for preserving the longevity of the crop. "Red clover is temperamental. If you graze it too tight you will lose it, so the electric fence is good for sub-dividing paddocks," he adds.

Care is also needed around silaging. "We cut silage without a conditioner and ted it gently, before rowing up and baling. It must be done within 24h to minimise loss of protein from the clover leaf," he says.

"Input from Farming Connect has been invaluable and I now feel we are making our business more efficient and sustainable."



Chris Davies says clover is benefiting ewes and lambs on the farm.

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Key considerations for your herbal leys' first graze of the year

By Lizzie Arnold, Cotswold Seeds

Now is the time for any herbal leys planted in autumn to have their first graze, but there are a few important guidelines to follow to ensure they continue to be a productive forage.

Rotational or mob grazing is the preferred method for managing herbal leys. This differs from typical permanent pasture leys where livestock are often set stocked on areas and moved when the sward stick determines it's time to move them on.

Sheep are prone to cherry picking the species they find the most appealing, but rotational grazing prevents them from doing this, preserving your ley for longer. Persistent grazing without any rest can quickly result in swards losing their diversity.

Extended grazing

Rotation lengths will vary season to season with the approximate grazing time being anywhere between 25-40 days (30-35 days average). It's important to remember there is an over-yielding effect with herbal leys. Thanks to the quantity of species included in the mixture, plant growth will often overlap one another, which helps to extend the grazing season. This fluctuation in growth is why rotation times can vary.

It is also a good idea to back fence once the sheep are moved onto the next area to prevent them returning to the previous spot and damaging the ley further by grazing defoliated plants.



Looking at your leys in their first grazing season, it may seem they have a higher percentage of grass. But this begins to change as the soils warm and grazing begins – the grass growth is reduced, allowing more light into the base of the sward. The legumes and herbs take advantage of this and through photosynthesis their production levels begin to increase.

This is why monitoring soil temperature is recommended. Grasses will begin growing at around 5°C whereas legumes and herbs won't come out of their winter dormancy until soil temperatures are at a consistent 7°C or above. This often means herbal leys need to warm up in the spring before grazing, as grazing too early will put growth on the back foot.

When you begin grazing, aim to leave approximately 6-8cm of growth on the sward as this helps to protect the crowns of species, such as chicory and red clover. It will also leave a good cover in the base of the sward ensuring soil surface is nicely covered and more able to tolerate drought.

Key species

There are a few specific species to watch once grazing has begun. Chicory is excellent for finishing lambs. It is high in protein and has anthelmintic properties, which can help reduce the worm burden in your flock. Its tap roots penetrate deep into the soils helping mine minerals and condition soils. Overgrazing will result in damage to the chicory crown, letting in moisture causing it to quickly die back in the sward.

Red clover is similar to chicory in the regrowth comes from its crown. If the crown is damaged

it will die back in the sward. Red clover is high in protein making it a useful species for fattening lambs. It also has a deep root structure for a clover, which helps increase the drought resistance of your sward.

High protein

Sainfoin is not a species that will feature in everyone's herbal ley since it needs free draining naturally alkaline soils. Like chicory, it is known to possess natural anthelmintic properties and, due to the presence of tannins in the plant, it doesn't cause bloat. It is also high in protein. Sainfoin is slow to establish and hard grazing will damage the plant meaning you'll quickly lose this beneficial species from the sward.

Lucerne is another high protein species often used in herbal ley mixtures. It's also deep rooting and a nitrogen fixing species, making it a useful addition to any herbal ley. Care must be taken when grazing, especially in its first season. It's similar to red clover and chicory in it regenerates from its crown.

When you are introducing sheep to a herbal ley for the first time, take into account the rotation length and stocking density. These factors can change throughout the season, but the guidance on sward heights remains the same. Make sure you leave approximately 6-8cm of growth on the herbal ley.

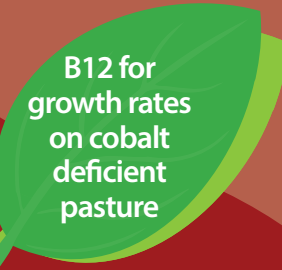
Overgrazing may result in the sward having to be over-seeded to reintroduce diversity into the sward. The benefits of herbal leys are numerous and protecting the more delicate species of the sward will result in a well-balanced resilient sward, which will perform year-on-year.



Sainfoin is high in protein but can be slow to establish.

Supporting ewe and lamb health through post lambing challenges

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Includes



Your partner in supporting lamb and ewe health this season



*1. Vizzotto, E.F., Stivanin, S.C.B., de Paris, M., Passos, L.T., Wemcke, D., Klein, C.P., Stone, V., Matté, C., Zanela, M.B. and Fischer, V., 2021. Supplementation with green tea and oregano extracts on productive characteristics, blood metabolites, and antioxidant status of Jersey cows during the transition period. animal, 15(2), p.100032.

Utilising the available tools to keep ahead of worms this season

As the grazing season begins SCOPS has two tools at your fingertips to help determine if and/or when to treat lambs for effective worm control.

Changing weather patterns, increasing resistance levels, advancements in technology and effective worm control knowledge mean all available tools should be utilised to manage worms in lambs.

Predict outbreaks

First the SCOPS Nematodirus Forecast. Due to significant variations in weather conditions from year to year, predicting the exact timing of a nematodirus outbreak is challenging. But when an outbreak occurs, which tends to be in young lambs six to 13 weeks of age, it can rapidly cause severe harm or even death. For this worm species, faecal egg counts (FECs) are not reliable indicators of current risk, because the damage is caused by immature larvae so eggs will not be present in faecal samples.



Lambs are at risk from nematodirus from six weeks of age.

The main difference in the lifecycle of *Nematodirus battus* compared to other parasitic worms, is the development to an infective larva occurs within the egg, allowing infection to pass from one year's lamb crop to the next. The eggs typically require a period of cold weather followed by warmer temperatures of 10°C or more to hatch. If these conditions occur in quick succession, it can trigger a mass hatch. When this coincides with lambs beginning to consume significant amounts of grass – at around six weeks old – the impact can be devastating.

A wait and see approach or treating at a set time just in case is not reliable because the chances of getting the timing right are slim.

The forecast predicts the hatching of nematodirus based on local weather conditions, providing a guide to the risk level in your area. To assess the risk for individual lamb groups, consider the field's history, aspect and altitude.

South-facing fields typically experience earlier hatching and for every 100m (328ft) increase in altitude hatching is delayed by about seven days. For example, if your nearest weather station is at 200m (656ft) and your farm is at 100m, hatching could occur around seven days earlier than the forecast.

Utilise FECs

Another tool is FECs, which measure the number of eggs shed by adult worms in the gut of sheep. These come into play when the other worm species, such as strongyles, become active.

Their uses vary throughout the year, but they can help determine when treatment for strongyle species may be necessary, what level of contamination is going onto different pastures and they can also be used to check how effective



Faecal sampling tips

- Collect fresh samples, ideally still warm to the touch, but no more than one hour old. If the faeces are too old, some eggs may have hatched leading to underestimation.
- Keep samples cool (not frozen) in an airtight container or plastic bag. They can be kept in the fridge.
- Process or deliver samples for analysis within 48h. Do not post samples on a Friday.
- Collect samples from a minimum of 10-15 animals, chosen at random, ensuring the same amount of faeces comes from each.
- Test each management group separately every two to four weeks, depending on previous results, weather conditions and other risk factors.

a worming treatment has been.

The quality of the faecal samples taken is crucial if they are to be reliable. Poor samples will not give good results. There are an increasing number of options available, such as equipped and trained vet practices, agriculture merchants and commercial services, or to adopt a DIY approach.

Based on the results, discuss product choices with your vet, SQP or adviser and explore how FEC monitoring can improve worm control in your flock.

Ensure you investigate how to monitor the efficacy of the different wormer groups on your farm. If you haven't already utilised the Defra Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, a wormer treatment check is part of the programme, so use this as a starting point. There is also a similar scheme available in Scotland.

More at www.scops.co.uk.

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

The Register of Sheep Advisers



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Tail docking and castration may not be necessary in early lambing flocks.

New ideas on tailing and castration methods to benefit your flock and you

With lambing season well underway, now is the time to reflect on tailing and castration management practices to improve lamb welfare and reduce workload next season.

With an ever-increasing consumer focus on animal welfare, it's important the sheep industry protects and enhances its natural, welfare-friendly image, as well as realising the production benefits stemming from improved animal welfare.

Tailing and castrating of lambs are legally classed as mutilations, but are permitted for health, welfare or management purposes. Recent UK research suggests 15% of sheep farmers castrate and tail dock because it's what they have always done – so it is worth asking yourself whether your reasons for carrying out these procedures are justifiable and if they can be reduced, refined or replaced.

Devolved legislation

The methods allowed under legislation vary across the devolved administrations and it is important you ensure compliance by checking the appropriate government website.

Across the whole of the UK, a docked tail must be long enough to cover the vulva of a female and anus of a male sheep. Docking too short, as well as being illegal, also has potential to cause increased risk of vaginal and rectal prolapses and increased faecal staining to the tails.

Reduced castration in early lambing flocks is common, as lambs can be left entire as they will leave the flock prior to sexual maturity. This brings the added advantage of a reduced workload at lambing and improved growth rate in the entire lambs. Similarly, lambs that will reach slaughter weight prior to the period of major flystrike risk do not require tail docking. An example in lowland flocks would be only tailing animals being retained for breeding, showing consideration for when these practices are required, as opposed to a blanket rule.

If castration is not required, switching to hot iron tail docking and delaying the procedure until lambs are gathered for another reason, for example vaccination or weighing, could be a suitable option for your flock.

Examples of ways to reduce, refine and replace the need to tail dock are:

- Reduce by only docking those due to be on farm in flystrike season.
- Use new methods for the intervention, use pain relief and use local anaesthetic to refine current practices.
- Replace the need to reduce faecal contamination through worm control, select shorter tail breeds of sheep and use of wool shedding breeds.

Examples of ways to reduce, refine and replace the need to castrate are:

- Reduce by only castrating those likely to be on farm at sexual maturity, for example leaving early born single tup lambs entire.
- Use new methods for the intervention, use pain relief and use local anaesthetic to refine current practices.
- Replace the need by separating male and female lambs at weaning.

If you still require docking or castrating, reflecting on the method both on timings and pain relief is essential, considering if it can be refined to improve the animal's experience.

Docking in the first 24h of life can cause issues with mismothering and failure to receive enough colostrum due to pain response reducing the lamb's ability to suckle. Delaying tail docking and castration so the ewe-lamb bond is stronger is recommended.

We know ewes demonstrate increased maternal behaviours to lambs displaying pain behaviours and a recent study showed female lambs display more acute pain behaviours than male lambs at tail docking. So, where opposite sex pairs exist in a set of twins, the maternal bond can be directed more to the female lamb by docking.

Pain behaviours

You may be thinking I don't see any evidence of pain in my lambs when I dock them. This is because young lambs have a lack of ability to express pain so lower levels of pain behaviours are displayed in younger lambs. This is typically characterised by increased lying behaviours.

The use of local anaesthetic in the area to be castrated/tail docked, as well as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, can help reduce pain. These

can be prescribed by your vet. These positive interventions are often low cost and not prohibitive from a time perspective.

In other sectors, such as dairy calves, the law requires local anaesthetic at disbudding, with many milk buyers adding additional requirements to provide pain relief. It is not unrealistic to think additional provision of pain relief for lambs may become a legislative requirement.

There are already some certification standards that do not permit docking and castration without justification and if required focus on methods to reduce, refine and replace the practice.

Use of newer devices, such as Numnuts and ClipFitter, replace older techniques with improved lamb welfare. The Numnuts applicator administers local anaesthetic to the site at the time of rubber ring placement, which has been shown to reduce pain behaviours in lambs at tailing.

Techniques

Different castration techniques cause different levels of pain. The lowest appears to be the plastic castration/docking clip called ClipFitter. It works like a combination of Burdizzo and rubber ring. A project showed when ClipFitter was applied to lambs under seven days of age they displayed significantly less acute pain behaviours than with rubber rings or Burdizzo. Although this does incur an increased expense when starting off with these newer products, comparative to the rubber rings, they have the potential to save you time and improve welfare.

There are some breeds that have replaced the need to tail dock due to a naturally short tail and minimal fleece. These include sheep in the Northern European short-tailed group, Shetlands and, more recently, wool-shedding breeds such as Easy Cares and Exlanas that have a reduced propensity to flystrike.

Changing breeds is not an option for many and so refining and reducing tailing and castrating will remain essential to improve lamb welfare.

It's worth discussing your options to reduce, refine and replace current tail docking and castration practices. It may be the strategy you are implementing on farm is the most appropriate for your system and, providing you remain compliant with the legislation, no changes may be necessary. But, having the conversation with your vet and reflecting on your practices is a positive step for managing this complex animal health challenge.

Reasons for lamb intervention.

Tail docking	Castration	Questionable reasons for both practices
Prevent flystrike	Avoid unwanted pregnancy	Market price
Prevent faecal contamination	Avoid ram taint	Tradition
	Adequate carcass fat cover	Breed standard
	Energy put into growth	Aesthetics/appearance
	Ease of handling male lambs	



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The importance of individual risk assessments for BTV vaccination

By Anna Wilson, NSA

As the weather improves and warmer temperatures beckon, so does the increased risk of bluetongue.

Last summer bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV3) spread across Northern Europe at an alarming rate and was especially severe in sheep, with high mortality rates. The impact was not felt as badly in the UK, but there is no crystal ball to tell us what to expect this year.

Licensed vaccine

Vaccines are now available under a special license for use in England and recently licensed in Wales, so now is the time to assess your farm risk before things warm up. The Ruminant Health & Welfare Group has created a coloured decision-making tool designed to work through with your vet, highlighting scenarios classed from high to low risk, allowing you to assess your individual farm risk of BTV infection.

Cost is a major factor for many, especially when it comes on top of medicine costs already in flock health plans. There are multiple vaccines available from clostridial protection to footrot prevention. They all have an important role in protecting the health of our flocks and it can be difficult to choose which ones will have the most benefit. Speaking to your vet to identify problems most affecting your flock can help to narrow

down the list to choose the most essential. There are three BTV vaccines available, so discuss the different options with your vet.

The number of animals to vaccinate may also result in a high financial outlay with no guarantee. It may be worth considering the value of the stock versus the cost of vaccinating.

Certain pedigree breeds may be of high monetary value, but rare breeds, strong bloodlines and sentimental sheep are also high value as they cannot be replaced by simply buying them in. Where cost creates a barrier to vaccination, prioritising those deemed irreplaceable could be a compromise.

Careful monitoring

At the moment, farms located in the North of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are low risk, as well as those isolated, at high altitude or in exposed areas. Midges can fly approximately 20 miles, including over water, so careful monitoring of high midge population areas is essential.

The movement of the flock is also a consideration. Those travelling to shows, buying in stock or overwintering stock on lowland farms, are at higher risk than those with closed flocks, breeding their own replacements or only buying

Location is a risk factor for BTV infection.



in stock from low-risk areas. Testing bought-in animals should be discussed with a vet to protect your flock and avoid bringing in BTV.

The final area for consideration is the administration of the vaccine. The vaccine is not recommended to be given to pregnant ewes less than one-month pre-lambing, lambs under two months of age, or stock tups four weeks before needed for use. BTV vaccine use must be recorded and all doses accounted for, meaning all stock must be individually tagged. Vaccines should not be purchased if it cannot be administered correctly.

With all things considered, you must assess your farms individual risk with your vet and base vaccination decision on your individual needs.

More at www.ruminanthw.org.uk

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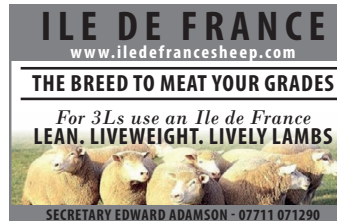


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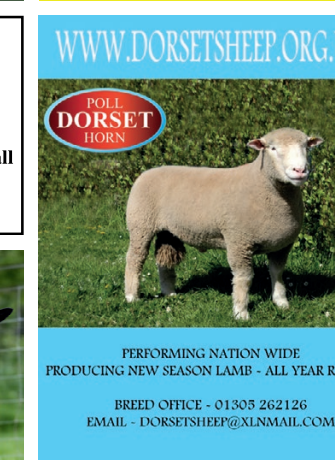
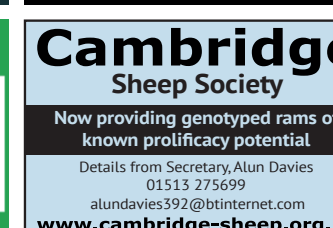
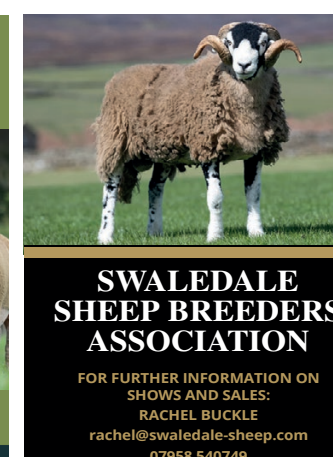
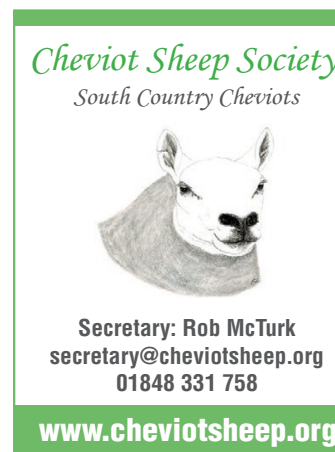
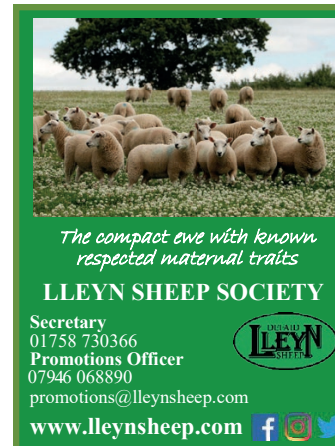


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Following the flock

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

Rich Rossiter

NSA South West Region Chair, Devon

We started the year lambing the Suffolk cross Aberblacks and remaining Poll Dorsets.

We trialed mob mating the ewes with the early lambing Dorsets, which lambed from mid-September for four weeks. I was happy with the outcome as we had a much tighter lambing period – 300 out of 430 in the first 10 days – higher conception rate and more lambs so a win all round.

In February we completed some more emissions testing using a portable accumulation chamber for the Breed for Ch4nge project with the Exlanas and Poll Dorsets. Around 332 ewe lambs passed through the chambers to measure the methane output of each individual sheep.

We had the first Dorset breed sales in March where we selected our best ram lambs. Elsewhere on the farm we held a memorial ball for my Dad, David Rossiter, who sadly passed away in November. It was a great success with more than 300 people attending raising an outstanding £25,111 for Prostate Cancer UK. My wife and I are currently training for the London Marathon, which we will run in April, continuing our fundraising efforts for this charity in Dad's memory.

March was our busiest period, lambing 300 ewes over four weeks. While lambing, we have been bluetongue vaccinating and getting the Dorset ewes sorted ready to go back to the ram in April. We are having our second on-farm sale in August and are selecting Dorset shearling ewes to go to some of our best stock rams for our in-lamb ewes at the sale.



Rich and wife Alice are fundraising in memory of David Rossiter.



Edward has some good lambs on the ground despite Schmallenberg in NI.

Edward Adamson

NSA Northern Ireland Chair, County Antrim

The ewes wintered much better this year despite some periods of extreme weather, a change from the continually wet weather last year.

In farming, we can't take our eyes off the ball. Last autumn I was hoping those pesky little midges wouldn't bring bluetongue virus into Ireland but hadn't considered the threat of Schmallenberg. Pedigree breeders lambing in late December and January had varying degrees of infection – we even had a small number ourselves in late January.

I do not consider myself as a candidate for mental stress but for those with a lot of infected ewes, I now know it does create pressure. The only good to come of it is our pedigrees are almost finished lambing and commercials won't start until April. So we should be okay for the rest of this year and the flock has hopefully built up some immunity for a few years to come. It's a shame a Schmallenberg vaccine isn't commercially viable for manufacturers as the early lambers would welcome the opportunity to vaccinate.

In a similar situation for clostridial vaccine availability. The advice is to use an alternative even though it may not have as good coverage.

Ever the optimist and looking forward to spring, I hope it's not just my imagination and the grass is actually beginning to get greener, rather than the rain washing the mud off it.



Anthony Warmington

NSA Marches Region Chair, Gloucestershire

To those who don't know me my name is Anthony Warmington, although more people know me as 'Boggy' – ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

I shepherd 1,400 Lleyn ewes on a private estate in the Cotswolds. The farm ranges from 750ft (229m) to just under 1,000ft (305m) and my soil is about as thick as a cigarette paper. Although this year even that seems to have been wet.

Outside of work I seem to be something of a glutton for sheep. If I'm not on the farm you will find me either at a sheepdog trial or a shearing competition. I guess there's just no helping some people.

I became the NSA Marches Region Chair in January and it seems to have been a constant battle with the weather since then. Scanning was a touch lower than what we would normally expect but this seems to have been the case for most in the locality.

I'm looking forward to the spring and getting out to meet more of the region's members and I hope to create a few new ones. If you see me out don't be afraid to come and say hello.



Anthony shepherds 1,400 Lleyn ewes in the Cotswolds.

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