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Honesty and truth is the best policy

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



With so much up in the air over the future of land management in the UK we are seeing growing examples of the results of populist decisions and distorted evidence.

Well over 300 significant wildfires have been reported this spring with many of these fuelled by high volumes of dry vegetation often linked with the removal and reduction of grazing animals. In an often singularly focused ambition to improve the environment and help nature recover, the result is exactly the opposite.

Small mammals, nests and reptiles burned to death, often unidentified invertebrate populations further damaged and more carbon released into the atmosphere. Tens of thousands of newly planted trees, funded by the taxpayer, now dead. Yet still we hear of more and more pressure on sheep and farming activity in the uplands.

We haven't necessarily got everything right in the past and there are plenty of examples where, given the right signals, things could be done differently and better. But multifunctionality has to be the order of the day if we are to meet the numerous demands on our land.

Climate change

I have long questioned the criticism of sheep farming on climate change and net zero grounds. We still get drawn into measuring emissions without looking at the complete carbon cycle and are lumbered with assessments using GWP100 rather than GWP*, which ignore the rapid breakdown of enteric methane from grazed livestock.

These imperfect assessments risk the breakdown of long-established food production and land management systems suiting our climate and land type risking food security at a time when it's becoming more important.

We all want to see abundant nature, although our controversy rages when you get to the extremes of white tailed eagles and Eurasian lynx. We are also told Britain is the most nature depleted country in the world – a snappy headline – and I've never believed it.

There is no formal definition of nature-depleted, it emerged from the creation of the Natural History Museum's Biodiversity Intactness Index. It summarises the change in ecological communities in response to human pressures – such as land use change, population growth and landscape simplification – by comparing current biodiversity with a baseline of species from near-undisturbed sites. The value therefore decreases as the human influence on natural ecosystems increases.

Nature loss

According to this index the UK has just 53% of its original nature left intact due to our long history of population expansion and associated land uses putting Britain in the bottom 10% of the 240 nations included in the assessment.

But if you use an alternative metric, the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), it paints a different picture. Our population, industrial history, climate and soils mean our land is highly adapted to food production. Over centuries our ecology has adapted towards species that have a relationship with a farmed habitat.

Rather than estimate the area of the UK deemed natural, this index is based on habitat intactness. Here we rank 43/152 nations. And this is just one of seven different indicators the EPI uses to assess a country's actions toward retaining natural ecosystems and protecting the full range of biodiversity. For biodiversity, Britain ranks 23/180 putting us in the top quartile – a very different picture indeed.

If we are going to get land management decisions right – and approaches to food production more sensitive and responsible – then we need to use more honest metrics and messages. We must also play our part in living up to the claims we make, whether it's having the strictest environmental regulations, highest animal welfare standards and health status, or the best traceability of livestock or food.

Dealing with today's soundbites and populist decisions is an ongoing problem. But honesty and evidence grounded by truth has to be the best long-term policy.



National Sheep Association

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Official NSA AGM notice

Notice is hereby given that the 132nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the National Sheep Association will be held on Tuesday 12th August 2025, 2pm in the Hartington Room at Chatsworth Estate Farm, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1PP.

An additional online joining option will be provided (details nearer the time) but this will be subject to the internet connection on the day.

By order of the Board, the AGM will transact the following business:

- To approve the minutes of the 131st AGM.
- To receive and adopt the Trustees Report and Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2024.
- To elect officers for the ensuing year (President and Treasurer), Vice Presidents and auditors.
- To adopt the proposal to increase annual subscription fees from 1st January 2026.
- To consider and vote on the special resolution that the NSA Articles of Association presented at the meeting replace the existing articles.

Please visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events for details of the proposed subscription increase, information on the special resolution and instructions on how to appoint a proxy if you cannot attend. If you do not have internet access, please call NSA Head Office. The deadline for proxy forms is 5pm on Friday 8th August 2025. Attendance is open to all, but only NSA members can vote at the AGM.

The meeting will be followed by a farm tour showcasing the estate's livestock enterprise of 3,000 breeding ewes and 300 suckler cows, covering 5,000 acres (2,000ha) of beautiful Derbyshire countryside including estate parkland, moorland and improved grassland.



An estate tour will be included in the AGM.

NSA to exhibit at Groundswell

NSA is excited to be heading to the popular Groundswell event in Hertfordshire this July, taking a small stand space within the British Wool marquee for the first time.

The Groundswell event is marketed as a regenerative agricultural festival providing a forum to learn about the theory and practical applications of regenerative farming systems.

NSA will also be hosting and chairing several seminars highlighting the role of sheep within regenerative agriculture, such as sheep in arable and agroforestry systems.

Further details of the NSA sessions will be shared with members via NSA communications in the weeks leading up to the event.



Don't miss NSA sessions at Groundswell this summer.

NSA member takes role as SCOPS Deputy Chair

The Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group has announced Somerset sheep farmer Olly Matthews' appointment as its new Deputy Chair.

Olly, an NSA South West Region committee member, farms in partnership with his brother Edward on the edge of the Exmoor National Park between Taunton and Minehead.

As Deputy Chair, Olly will support SCOPS Chair Kevin Harrison and will help develop understanding and involvement in SCOPS. He says: "I hope I can bring my enthusiasm for sheep farming into the position, as well as a practical opinion on how things can be implemented on farm. I believe the profile of SCOPS has really grown over recent years and I am proud to now be part of it." *More on SCOPS at www.scops.org.uk.*



Olly farms on Exmoor with his brother Edward.



Emma and her family are excited to be winners thanks to NSA this year.

NSA giveaways aid more UK sheep farmers

Two further lucky sheep farmers are now enjoying the convenience of a new pair of cordless clippers thanks to the NSA 2025 prize giveaway.

Picked at random from all entries, Emma Reid from Turriff, Aberdeenshire, was the lucky winner of the prize at the end of March before NSA member Nancy Leaney from Cenarth, near Newcastle Emllyn, Dyfed, became the fourth winner at the end of April.

The prizes – a pair of Lanati Astron cord-free handpieces worth more than £450 – are kindly provided by Rurtec. There are eight more chances to win this year as a single winner is selected at the end of each month. The prize draw is open to any UK sheep farmer above the age of 16. Entries are limited to one per person/email address.

NSA Central Region welcomes new manager

Andrew McNeil, a farmer from South Yorkshire, is the new NSA Central Region Manager.

Andrew lives within NSA Central Region and runs a smallholding with his wife. They're well known in the beef showring and also have a flock of Charollais sheep.

Andrew says: "I'm delighted to accept the role with NSA and am looking forward to working with members in the Central Region, the region's new Chair Ed Brant, the committee and wider NSA."

Leave a gift in your will

Leaving a legacy to NSA in your will is a powerful way to ensure the future of the UK sheep sector and support the next generation. Your gift, no matter the size, will help NSA continue its vital work promoting best practices, advancing research and giving the sheep farming community a strong, unified voice. By remembering NSA in your will, you are investing in the sustainability, welfare and innovation of the sector for years to come. *Contact enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk for more details.*

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.



NSA supports new report on equivalent standards for agricultural imports.

Welfare charities back British farming

Any report highlighting the disparity between farming standards in Britain and those abroad is welcomed by NSA.

And this is exactly what a joint report from the animal welfare charities Animal Protection International, RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming did when they released 'Closing the welfare gap: why the UK must apply its animal protection standards to imports' in late April.

The report mirrors the messaging of NSA and other farming bodies but possibly carries more weight because it is produced by groups not directly farming.

It underlines substandard practices in Australia, New Zealand and Turkey, with MP support. Ministers from the House of Commons criticised double standards as duplicitous and problematic for farmers, consumers and animals.

Australian lamb imports rose 47% in 2024 to 19,300t according to AHDB. The quota level in 2032 is 75,000t. NSA therefore stresses that if volumes are expected to rise, then it's even more important the quality of the lamb and production system is assured to be as good as the UK.

NSA sees opportunity in new trade deal

Lamb exports have been at the forefront of discussions around the benefits of the recently signed free trade deal with India.

With previous tariffs on UK lamb of 33% of import value, NSA, along with meat processors and other industries, have welcomed the news.

Importantly for UK sheep farmers, India's food safety issues and the very nature of the country's nomadic and backyard-dominated sector should mean the impact on supermarket shelves is negligible in the short-term.

Because of a joint policy document from 2024 – produced by India's National Meat Research Institute and the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management – put food safety as the main concern for future policy makers, it should mean the flow of lamb between the UK and India is one way.

But NSA will be watching this development closely. With 74m sheep – and twice as many goats – India has the world's second largest flock behind China and produces more than a million tonnes of sheepmeat in a year, compared to the UK's output of under 300,000t. The threat is a potential one, rather than an immediate one.

India does export sheepmeat successfully, but primarily to Arab nations with very different requirements and specifications to those in Britain and Europe. In fact, trade data shows India has developed a taste for New Zealand lamb, which may help UK producers in the long run.



Indian free trade deal brings prospect but must be watched carefully.



Concerns of sea eagle reintroduction in the South West rumble on.

NSA concerned by sea eagle license consideration

Worries grow in the South West after an application to introduce up to 20 sea eagles in the Exmoor area, Devon, was submitted to Natural England.

The Roy Dennis Foundation claims modern reintroduction methods are far more developed and natural than in the past. By using automatic gates, CCTV and nighttime feeding, the birds remain naïve to humans.

While introducing large birds known to prey upon lambs is worrying for farmers, it's important to know every region is different. Coastal habitats, fish stocks, seal populations and estuary topography all influence bird feeding behaviour.

NSA will provide robust data and member testimonies throughout the consultation process from elsewhere in the UK where sea eagle predation is a problem and keep you up to date with any reintroduction news.

Foot-and-mouth controls stepping up

News of personal product bans for travellers through airports and seaports being put in place to keep foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) out of the UK is admired by NSA.

A whole area ban of movement of livestock products (meat and dairy) into the UK from the EU was announced on April 12th. Worryingly, Hungary reported a new FMD case on April 17th in a 600-head cattle unit after pleading they had the disease under control. Pirbright testing suggests this is a new incursion, not a secondary spread.

At the time of writing, blanket import bans remain applied to Austria, Hungary and Slovakia. Germany has been reduced to the specific 6km containment zone east of Berlin.

Defra assures NSA that Border Force has clear instructions to enforce personal product ban rules. This has included an infographic for travellers explaining what has been banned.

Travel companies have a pivotal role to play in changing tourist and traveller behaviour. Amnesty bins in which products can be discarded without making passengers feel like law breakers is the best way to get public cooperation NSA suggests.



Security tightened to reduce the risk of FMD reaching UK.

NSA Regions

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Contact NSA Head Office for further information.**South East**Chair: **Susie Parish**Manager: **Sarah Blake**
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For NSA Eastern Region (Rugby/Melton) and NSA South East Region (Thame) ram sales enquiries, please contact NSA Head Office using the details on page 1.

NSA regional reports

NSA Central Region

By Andrew McNeil, Manager

I'm thrilled to officially be in post as Regional Manager.

Together with new regional Chair Ed Brant and the rest of the team we have exciting plans and I look forward to meeting members. Please get in touch with any feedback, queries or proposals.

In early May we enjoyed an informative evening at Mole Valley with Ben Strugnell from Farm Post Mortems. It was great to see regional members in attendance.

I invite all to the upcoming farm walk on the afternoon of Sunday 8th June, kindly hosted by Will Roobottom at Cowley Hill Farm, Staffordshire. Will has a fantastic flock of Lleyen sheep and integrates technology into his farming practices to improve efficiencies.

Further news and details of the regions attendance at this summer's forthcoming Hope Show and Sheepdog Trials will be shared soon.



The Region welcomes Andrew McNeil as Manager.

NSA Eastern Region

By Nerys Wright, Manager

The region is gearing up for it's afternoon farm walk on Wednesday 18th June from 4pm.

Hosted by T.P Gilman, attendees can see the Signet recorded sheep flock and arable business based in the hamlet of Tixover, Rutland, and hear from Lesley Stubbings, independent sheep consultant, and Laura Eyles, Signet. More details online on the NSA events page.

We are pleased to confirm the NSA Eastern Region Next Generation Shepherd Day will be held on Saturday 6th September at the Writtle Campus of Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. Aspiring young shepherds and sheep farmers are welcome for a great day. [More on page 17.](#)

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

Our first regional farm walk is on Thursday 12th June at Castle Farm, East Sussex, by kind permission of Frank Langrish.

Frank runs a low-input 4,000 ewe operation and is experimenting with imported New Zealand Snowline rams to improve wool quality on his Romney sheep. The afternoon concludes with a BBQ so for catering purposes please register your attendance with me.

Don't miss the biennial Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) Conference on the 14th-16th of October and the Annual Ram Sale on Friday 5th September.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

With only one week left until we open the gates at Greystoke Farm for the much-anticipated return of NSA North Sheep, the region has been busy behind the scenes making sure everything is ready.

We're excited to bring you a packed schedule of seminars, workshops and demonstrations, along with a record number of trade stands for you to explore. Have you signed up for the Breakfast Club Seminar starting at 8:45am yet? We'll be discussing how to build resilience post Basic Payment Scheme. Everyone who registers will receive a free bacon butty and a hot drink. Don't miss out – register now on the NSA North Sheep website.



Join NSA the South East region farm walk at Langrish Farmers.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

Preparations continue for NSA Sheep South West at Weston Farm, Devon, on June 25th, courtesy of the Stanbury family.

There is a great line-up of exhibitors, breed societies, workshops and seminars. Visitors will see how rotational grazing, herbal leys and cover crops are incorporated with their 1,000 breeding ewe flock and 145 suckler herd.

The event will also host the regional NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition and student young shepherd competition with a significant cash prize. If anyone 26 and under is interested in finding out more or taking part, please visit the event website or contact me directly. [Full preview on page 8 and host farm feature on pages 18-19.](#)

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

I would like to thank everyone involved with NSA Welsh Sheep – what a day.

The event would not happen without our hosts, sponsors, exhibitors, judges, regional committee members and all the volunteers. It was a huge success showcasing a new breed not normally associated with Welsh Sheep, the Romney, and proved production and sustainability can work together.

In May, David Pittendreich, winner of this years NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for Unsung Hero, was invited to Buckingham Palace for his contributions to the sector.

The region now looks forward to the Royal Welsh Show and would like to remind all members to come and see us.



David Pittendreich at Buckingham Palace.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Ellen Moorehead, Coordinator

The agricultural community in Northern Ireland has been buzzing since the highly anticipated Balmoral Show.

It was a fantastic few days, showcasing the strength and quality of the region's agricultural industry. The region was delighted to host the NSA Sheep Centre again at the event, offering a strong line-up of trade stands and range of breed exhibits.

We look forward to welcoming members and other visitors to NSA Sheep Northern Ireland July 1st. [Full preview on page 9 and host farm feature on pages 20-21.](#)

Sheep Farmer magazine

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Speak to Helen Roberts.
See page 2 for contact details.

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Many regions will be hosting NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

As Sheep Farmer magazine arrives with members the region will have held a discussion about halal and its growing importance.

Thanks go to speakers Dr Awal Fuseini and Martin Eccles, both from AHDB, for an interesting evening.

Coming soon is the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition and training day, on Sunday 29th June at Middle Farm, by kind permission of NSA Next Generation Ambassador, George Ellis. This popular event is a great opportunity for keen young shepherds to compete and show off their skills as well a chance for those looking to gain more knowledge and experience to come along and learn from industry experts. [More on page 17.](#)

NSA Scottish Region

By Debs Colley, Trustee

NSA Scottish Region Chair, Peter Myles, represented members at the Royal Highland Show AGM.

It was a fantastic opportunity to connect with others in the agricultural community and ensure the voice of Scottish sheep farmers was heard.

Later in the evening, Peter attended the prestigious British Veterinary Association dinner at Holyrood, Edinburgh. This highlighted the crucial relationship between sheep farming and veterinary expertise.

The region is gearing up for NSA Highland Sheep on Wednesday 11th June. It promises to be an exciting day for all attendees not to be missed. [Full event preview on page 6.](#)

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Stunning location set to welcome visitors to NSA Highland Sheep

NSA Highland Sheep 2025, taking place on Wednesday 11th June at Midfearn Farm, Ardgay, offers a full day of activities designed to showcase all aspects of the sheep sector.

Hosted by the Brooke family and organised by NSA Scottish Region, the event is a must for sheep farmers, breeders and anyone with an interest in rural life. Visitors will experience livestock excellence, practical demonstrations and informative sessions throughout the day.

The farm tour, running from 9am to 3pm, will allow visitors to view Midfearn's impressive flock of 650 ewes and lambs and 110 suckler cows and calves. The tour will also highlight Watson Seeds' trial plots, which feature a variety of grass sward mixes aimed at improving soil health and livestock performance.

Live demonstrations

There will be live demonstrations showcasing practical skills and innovations in sheep farming. Agrimin representatives will demonstrate bolusing techniques and discuss the vital role of trace elements for flock health. Charlie Macneil, a skilled crook maker, will share his expertise providing a fascinating insight into this traditional craft. Visitors will also have the chance to watch John 'Beachy' Barclay and his sons demonstrate how to prepare sheep for show or sale. The Speed Shear competition will be another highlight of the event.

The farm to fork programme will feature two key demonstrations on lamb. Jock Gibson from Macbeth's Butchers and Gordon Newlands from QMS will lead a butchery session, showcasing the versatility of Midfearn's Blackface lamb. In a similar vein Simon Rodgers, North Highland College, will conduct a cookery demonstration using the hosts lamb.

Another major highlight will be the Show & Sale of Pairs of Ewe Hogs, where top-quality sheep will be on display for judging and sale. Seven breed classes will be available offering a range of native and continental breeds. The NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition will also take place, with the winner going on to represent NSA Scottish Region at the national finals in 2026.



Join the popular sheep show and sale.

Competitions

For those interested in sheepdog trials, the event will feature a regional invitational competition with top handlers from across the Highlands. In addition, the SAYFC national sheepdog final will see six finalists compete for the top prize. The trials will be an exciting spectacle, with a designated viewing area for spectators.

The seminar programme will cover a variety of topics offering an opportunity for farmers and industry experts to discuss key issues. A series of smaller workshops will also take place throughout the day providing visitors with practical advice on flock management, breeding and nutrition.

In addition to the farming activities, NSA Highland Sheep will showcase the estate's renewable energy, generating power from its hydro scheme for more than 100 years. Visitors will have the chance to learn about this historic and sustainable energy source.

More than 120 trade stands will be exhibiting, presenting the latest products and services for the sheep industry, from companies specialising in sheep health, genetics, machinery, fencing and more. There will also be a Farmers' Market and Craft Fair featuring local producers and artisans, offering a wide range of food, crafts and handmade goods.



Jock Brooke (owner) and Neil Shaw (farm manager).

highland sheep

NSA SCOTLAND 2025

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

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Seminar timetable

10.45am Inspections and policy

Chair: Peter Delbridge, NSA National Chair.

Speakers: Representatives from Scottish Government, Carol McLaren, RSABI, and Charlotte Pumphrey, Whole Farm Plan.

12noon Address by Jim Fairlie MSP

Chair: Peter Myles, NSA Scottish Region Chair.

12.50pm Social media, farm promotion and diversification

Chair: A representative from SAC Consulting.

Speakers: Cammy Wilson, Sheep Game, Janet McQuisten, Kitchen Coos & Ewes, and Tom Robertson, Embleton Mill.

2pm Lamb - What the market needs

Chair: Alasdair Macnab, AJM Agri.

Speakers: Awal Fuseini, AHDB, Jock Gibson, Macbeth's Butchers, and Victoria Ballantyne, Brora sheep farmer and Nuffield Scholar.

Buy and sell the best at an NSA Ram Sale



WHY PICK AN NSA RAM SALE?

Every animal is inspected for testicles, teeth and general health by NSA-approved inspectors with the final decision made by a vet.

Sheep with performance recording records are available and clearly identified in the catalogue.

All stock is sold under auctioneers' conditions of sale, with additional assurance from NSA Ram Sales if something goes wrong and the buyer needs to contact the vendor.

Different breeds and vendors are brought together in one place, offering sheep from all UK environments to suit various markets.

Some stock is sold as part of official breed society sales, with additional catalogue information available.

More than 7,000 head are offered at NSA sales collectively.

NSA Ram Sales 2025

NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale

Monday 4th August - Brecon Livestock Market

NSA South West Ram Sale

Wednesday 20th August - Exeter Livestock Centre

Thame Farmers Market Breeding Ewe Sale incorporating the NSA South East Region Ram Sale*

Friday 5th September - Thame Farmers Market

Melton Midlands Sheep Fair incorporating the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale*

Friday 19th September - Melton Mowbray Market

NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale

Monday 22nd September - Royal Welsh Showground

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



Rewards from regenerative system to be showcased at NSA Sheep South West

NSA Sheep South West returns this June as the key business-to-business event for sheep producers across South West England, set to give visitors an insight to the progressive farming enterprise at Weston Farm, East Knowstone, Devon.

A sure highlight for visitors will undoubtedly be the farm tour of the Stanbury's family sheep and beef enterprise that has grown to 500 acres (200ha), plus additional rented and common grazing.

The business is home to more than 1,000 ewes plus ewe lambs with breeds including Romney, North Country Mules and Suffolk Mules. The farm has also ventured into wool shedding breeds with Easycare and Exlana ewes. All sheep are finished on grass and herbal leys with the majority of sheep (and cattle) overwintered outside with rotational grazing – a key strategy to their success.

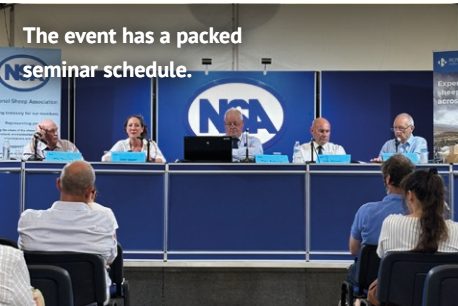


There will be a variety of breeds to see on the day.

Practical advice

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

From browsing tradestands to joining an insightful seminar with leading names from industry, there will be so much to see and do in addition to the farm tour.



The event has a packed seminar schedule.

Event seminars

- Optimising sheep health via the use of vaccination
Sponsored by MSD Animal Health.
- Finding the right genetics for the way you want to farm
Sponsored by Innovis.
- To wool or not to wool – that is the question
Sponsored by Siggs & Co.
- Can practical or technical innovation earn you funding through the ADOPT fund
Sponsored by UK Agri-Tech Centre.
- Meet the Farmer Q & A session
With event host Richard Stanbury.

The event itself will give visitors the chance to get involved with workshops and competitions including the south west heat of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. This will uncover the future regional finalist who is then put forward to compete in the national final held next year at NSA Sheep Event.

Future generation

Other competitions will include a photography competition with the theme of 'All things Sheep', a lamb selection contest, a fleece competition and the fun gift of the gavel contest, run by auctioneers Kivells, offering aspiring auctioneers a chance to take to the rostrum to demonstrate their selling skills.

There will be demonstrations taking place throughout the day providing ideas and advice to farmers on electric fencing and mobile watering solutions. A sheepdog sale will also take place for those searching for their next best friend and workmate. *Read the host farm feature on pages 18-19.*



The farm's 1,000 strong flock will be a highlight of the event.

Sheep South West 2025

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: your business your future

NSA Sheep South West promises to be a great day for all the family.



NSA Sheep Northern Ireland 2025: A date for every sheep farmer's diary

Trade stands will showcase the latest innovation in the sheep industry.

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland is set to take centre stage on Tuesday 1st July at the picturesque McFarlane family farm in Dungiven, County Londonderry.

The McFarlane family farm is a prime example of the region's agricultural excellence and will provide a dynamic backdrop for the event. The farm is home to 1,200 Mule ewes, predominantly crossed with Texel tups, alongside a dedicated flock of traditional hill ewes, well-suited to the local landscape. It's a setting that truly encapsulates the spirit of Northern Ireland's rural community.

Industry leaders

The event offers a packed schedule crafted to engage and educate. Attendees can look forward to insightful seminars delivered by leading industry experts, offering the latest knowledge and best practices. Competitive sheepdog trials will showcase the remarkable skills of both handlers and their canine partners.

The event will also feature sheep shearing demonstrations, a fiercely contested fleece competition and the prestigious NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. Breed society stands will provide a valuable opportunity to delve into the specifics of various breeds, while a diverse array of trade stands will showcase the latest innovations and technologies shaping the future of the agricultural sector.



The event is an ideal opportunity to research different sheep breeds.



The NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition is always popular.

Local produce

Beyond the core educational and competitive elements, NSA Sheep Northern Ireland is committed to providing a memorable day out for the entire family. A wide range of catering options will be available, offering delicious food and drink, allowing attendees to relax and connect with fellow farmers while soaking in the vibrant atmosphere.

This event is more than just a showcase; it's a crucial opportunity to connect with peers, exchange knowledge with industry leaders and

experience the very best of Northern Ireland's sheep farming. This event promises to be an unmissable opportunity for those immersed in the sector. Mark your calendars and join us at the McFarlane family farm. We look forward to welcoming you.

Read the host farm feature on pages 20-21.

Seminars

- Latest advice on parasite control with Philip Skuce, Moredun.
- The case for financial support for the sheep sector, followed by panel Q&A.
- Nutrition and health advice.

Workshops

- Pour-on application and dosing for optimal efficacy and animal safety.
- Dressing sheep for sales and shows.
- Sheep shearing and wool handling demonstrations by Ulster wool.



Admission
£10 Non-NSA
Members

Tuesday 1st July 2025

- 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

Positive offerings proposed in the next 25-year farm policy roadmap

By Michael Prestley, NSA

Delivery of an impressive list of government farm roadmap commitments will be monitored by NSA as the Land Use Framework begins to take shape.

Still in its embryonic phases, the Land Use Framework – from which the Farming Roadmap will spawn – is part-way through its first public consultation. This will be the basis of English land use policy for the next 25 years.

NSA, alongside other land-based organisations, submitted its responses in April and are now waiting for Defra's response due in July.

Government has acknowledged some of the major farmer bugbears over recent years. NSA welcomes the following comments from Steve Reed, Environment Secretary:

1. **Back British.** Public sector food buying will be monitored for the first time, giving domestic producers a chance to win a share of the public sector's £5bi food spend.
2. **Planning reforms.** Securing permissions for buildings, barns and infrastructure will be made quicker.
3. **Income diversity.** Accelerating grid connections will help farmers drive income by selling surplus energy from solar panels and wind turbines.
4. **Supply chain fairness.** Sheep have not been explicitly mentioned in this pledge so far, but there are positive moves in the pipeline for the pig sector, egg and fresh produce contracts.
5. **Trade deal protection.** High environmental and animal welfare standards will be upheld in future trade deals.

Reading Defra's literature around future farming policy, it's reassuring food security and farmers feature heavily.

There is an appreciation of the range and scale of the challenges facing England (and the wider UK) as the country strives to house a growing population, decarbonise, help support environmental habitats, address biodiversity decline, sequester carbon, create woodland and reshape its energy demands and production.

Multifunctional

The Land Use Framework consultation document starts with our land is our greatest natural asset. This should mean there is sufficient impetus to create a land use policy with farmers in mind and some hope the governments easily made promises are delivered.

It continues highlighting land can contribute so much in one single plot. Growing fresh produce and rearing animals, storing carbon and creating habitats for precious wildlife, providing homes and community spaces, and housing the infrastructure that supports our society.

This sets the tone for the document, which goes on to stress the importance of multifunctional land use. Herein lies the strength of ruminants, as they can provide so much from one acre.

Whether it be a hilltop, a lush valley, or grazing rotations in arable land, sheep can provide multifunctionality. From grazing Special Sites of Scientific Interest, severely disadvantaged, lesser favoured, or grade one land, UK farmers have numerous breeds and farming systems to deliver a host of benefits.

There are places where only sheep and the hardiest of cattle tend to be farmed, managing famous landscapes, such as Exmoor, the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales, and the Peak District. Here they fit alongside world-leading conservation projects and produce hardy genetics from iconic breeds.

Elsewhere, sheep graze under solar panels and build carbon in low organic matter arable soils by



Less productive land is the target for major land use change.

grazing grass leys in rotations, reducing herbicide requirements and improving soil health.

But there are areas where the Land Use Framework causes concern for NSA. One of the more alarming targets is a 9% loss of farmland, equating to almost 1.9m acres (760,000ha). This will largely come from less productive areas in the form of peat and woodland restoration, and coastal and lowland heathland restoration. Clearly, the upland areas are set to see further changes.

Adaptation

With so much to deliver, landowners and land managers must be open minded. Embracing system tweaks and adapting new ways of working will be vital for the country as a whole and the viability of individual businesses.

The UK produced 12% less sheepmeat last year than it did in 1985 but had 20% more people to feed. The UK's breeding flock is now below 14m. Farm support is changing and becoming harder to secure for many businesses. Meanwhile, much rhetoric around financial help is shrouded in the mystery of private capital in Land Use Framework documents.

Given this, NSA must continue to work hard ensuring the government considers the role of ruminants in nourishing the nation's people and landscapes. Sheep are not on an off and on switch, especially when genetics, skills and culture risk being lost forever.

Sheep should be considered as a multifunctional approach.



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.

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

Comparative trials

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

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

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

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

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Wildfires turn up the heat on upland burning consultation

By Michael Prestley, NSA

A severely dry spring has led to wildfires across the UK at a critical time for grass and heather burning legislation changes.

A landmark proposal to tighten grass and heather burn permitting has caused consternation with upland land managers, both in terms of workability and what many are calling flawed research.

NSA has been collaborating with members and other stakeholders to provide a robust response to Defra's proposal, which has two elements:

- To regulate heather and grass burning on all peat deeper than 40cm in less favoured areas. This is an extension of the regulations, as the law is currently to regulate heather and grass burning on peat deeper than 40cm on Special Sites of Scientific Interest that are also designated as Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas.
- To change the prohibition of burning on peat more than 40cm deep to peat more than 30cm deep, which Defra says will allow shallower peatlands to also be protected.

If implemented, the area of England's deep peat under protection will increase by 66% from just under 550,000 acres (222,000ha) to just under 910,000 acres (368,000ha).

The other elements open for consultation are the grounds under which a burn licence can be applied for, mandatory compliance with the heather and grass management code and training in fires/wildfires.

Increased risk

Destocking and burning regulations are two ways policy makers are inadvertently increasing wildfire risk. While the intentions might be good, the ideas are based on questionable research and

often have worrying unintended consequences.

Fires have torn across a range of habitats this spring in every devolved UK nation. Which, given the grass and heather burning proposal, has been quite timely, if not worrying. Undoubtedly, the crisp conditions and an abundance of dry fuel must be considered and experts have underlined climate change as a growing challenge in the UK's wildfire issue.

But many fires have taken place on land carrying fewer sheep than it used to and in some cases now carrying none. Fire crews have joined NSA in supporting that a lack of or reduction in grazing livestock has decreased grazing pressure, leading to a build-up in tinder material on some hills, meaning any fire that does start has the potential to be more dangerous.



In the US, goats are hired to manage wildfire tinder risks.

Records from the Global Wildfire Information System show more than 72,000 acres (29,200ha) have set alight so far this year, making 2025 a record year. Granted, the data only goes back to 2012, but to have a record-breaking year by late April – before the warm summer period – is still remarkable. The previous record is almost 69,500 acres (28,100ha), which was set across all 12 months of 2019.

NSA will be referencing fire crew insights in future wildfire discussions. NSA will continue to

monitor the progress of upland rewetting projects, which could be a long-term solution to peatland restoration while reducing the need for burning.

But in the meantime, an astounding number of wildfires have decimated vast swathes of the countryside, including wildlife reserves in Cornwall, Dorset, Montgomeryshire and the Isle of Arran.

Better management

It's clear tinder material needs managing now if long, dry spells are to become more normal. This can either be done reactively through the gallant efforts of local people and fire services or through proactive efforts of economic activities, such as hill farming alongside other upland enterprises.

Northern Irish MP Robbie Butler's Cut The Gorse, Not The Grazing slogan has done great service to the sheep industry by linking destocking of designated landscapes with threats to wider public safety. Ellen Moorehead and Edward Adamson, NSA Northern Ireland Region Officeholders, met with Mr Butler in April to discuss pressing issues for sheep farmers, of which wildfire management was one. Mr Butler agrees sheep aren't the problem, they are part of the solution.

And as we can learn lessons from Northern Ireland, we can look further afield for inspiration as every area has its unique conditions and challenges. For example, in Californian cities goats are part of wildfire management plans. Livestock farmers lease goats to city authorities to control the accretion of tinder.

With so much up for debate in terms of livestock's role in the world, surely this is another one in favour of grazing livestock. Better still, UK flocks can manage fire risk while giving people something to wear and something to eat – it's a win win.

How to prepare for bluetongue risks as we approach the high vector period

By Andrea Calvesbert, NSA

With warmer weather comes more midges increasing the bluetongue threat meaning sheep farmers, auctions and show organisers are implementing plans to maintain a successful business.

With Defra likely to have changed the current situation around movement restrictions by the time this edition of *Sheep Farmer* is published, it is almost impossible to devise a plan to cover every unseen eventuality.

But NSA has worked with our own show organisers to compile guidelines to help everyone make the most of their attendance at events, even if they are unable to bring sheep.

NSA continues to urge farmers to vaccinate their animals in conjunction with discussions with their vet for bluetongue serotype-3 (BTV-3). Two of the three vaccines – Bluevac-3 and Bultavao-3

– have now obtained pre-market approval with Syzavul BTV3 still available under emergency licence. Any of the three vaccines can be used and I'd urge farmers to order in plenty of time prior to vaccinating as there are reports of supply chain delays, so delivery is unlikely to be immediate.

Guidance

At the end of April, keepers reported more than 300,000 animals vaccinated. Of these just under 40,000 were sheep. Reports from vets sales show almost 610,000 doses sold with the difference due to keepers ordering but not necessarily vaccinating immediately.

In May Scotland approved the same vaccines for use by Scottish livestock keepers. It's mandatory for those in Scotland to keep a record of any bluetongue vaccination via ScotEID.

Louise Cameron, Scottish Government, says: "We will continue to monitor BTV-3 vaccine developments, uptake and effectiveness."



Vaccinating sheep is the best way to reduce the risk of BTV.

For anyone wanting more information on BTV vaccines, AHDB has a vaccination cost calculator available on its website and the Ruminant Health & Welfare website hosts information on the battle bluetongue campaign.

NSA will continue to share any updates on movement restrictions on its website and in the Weekly Email Update, keeping members as up to date as it can at this time.

[NSA guidance for show, sales and events can be found here www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

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* Further information is available on the SPC, pack leaflet or on request. Licensed for use with toxoplasmosis vaccine, can be used on the same day at separate injection sites. Cevac® Chlamydia contains: live attenuated 1B strain of Chlamydia abortus vaccine. Legal category [POM-V]. Please speak to your vet about using this product. Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone. Use medicines responsibly (www.noah.co.uk/responsible) Further information is available from Ceva Animal Health Ltd, Explorer House, Mercury Park, Wycombe Lane, Wooburn Green, HP10 0HH. Tel: 01628 334056

Find out more

Wales is still in the dark about future agri-environmental funding

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Keep Farmers Farming is the latest publication in Welsh Government's consultation process to produce the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS).

No detailed decisions on the SFS have been made, but comments from the Senedd suggest concerns raised through the consultation process are understood.

In response to farmers and industry, the government has published these principles:

1. Produce food in a sustainable manner.
2. Mitigate and adapt to climate change.
3. Maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide.
4. Conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources, promote public access to and engagement with them, and sustain the Welsh language.

Work will continue between the Ministerial Roundtable and its subgroups to resolve the remaining challenges before the scheme is finalised. Updates have been promised and a preparatory phase for 2025 will be published. The date of commencement for SFS is still 2026.

Concerns

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has responded to the Wales Wildlife and Rural Crime Strategy, which will be updated shortly. The consultation covered recent initiatives and collaborative efforts, as well as giving the opportunity to discuss some core worries for farmers, like theft, sheep worrying by dogs and trespass.

A reminder that Enferplex testing is available, which the region has helped fund. Using serum or milk the system can test for maedi visna, caseous lymphadenitis and John's disease.

HCC is engaging with levy payers and wider

stakeholders, to develop a new 'Welsh red meat industry vision' for 2026-30. As a key business within the industry, I'd welcome your input at this early stage prior to developing a draft working document for wider industry discussion.

Key areas to explore are what the biggest opportunities/challenges we face as an industry are and what could be done to improve the industry's performance and competitiveness?



Government sector support and sheep scab top of NSA NI Region agenda

By Ellen Moorehead, Regional Coordinator



The policy landscape for sheep farming in Northern Ireland continues to be a key area of focus.

A primary concern is the absence of a dedicated sheep support package within the already launched Strategic Agricultural Policy (SAP). While the SAP includes support for beef production, the sheep sector remains without specific financial assistance.

A recent meeting with Robbie Butler MLA, Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (AERA)

Committee, provided a crucial platform for the region to emphasise the urgent need for government action. These discussions highlighted the challenges faced by sheep farmers and the potential consequences of continued neglect.

Health

As an active member of the Sheep Taskforce in NI, the region has taken further steps to raise the profile of the industry and its needs. Formal invitations have been extended to Minister Muir and the AERA committee to attend a breakfast and tour of NSA Sheep NI on July 1st. This event aims to showcase the strength and resilience of the NI sheep industry firsthand, providing an opportunity to reinforce the critical importance of a dedicated support package.

In addition to these collective efforts regional member Campbell Tweed has drafted a comprehensive sheep genetics program proposal, outlining an approach to enhance the genetic potential of the NI sheep flock. While this proposal represents a significant effort to encourage the development of a sheep support package, a formal response from Daera is still awaited.

Another critical policy area is the ongoing work to develop a funded sheep scab program in Northern Ireland. It's a highly contagious and debilitating parasitic disease leading to reduced animal health and welfare. In severe cases weight loss, reduced fertility and increased susceptibility to secondary infections occur.

Consequences

Sheep scab also has significant economic consequences including reduced productivity, increased treatment costs and potential carcass condemnation. The persistent nature of the disease and control challenges take a significant mental toll on sheep owners.

NSA is actively supporting vet Paul Crawford in his efforts to secure funding and implement a comprehensive sheep scab program. Mr Crawford presented the requirements for a robust and effective programme at the May AERA committee meeting, offering a vital opportunity to stress the necessary resources and policy changes needed to address this serious disease. The region looks forward to the outcome of this hearing.



Vet engagement critical for BTV vaccine success in Scotland

By Michael Priestley, Policy Manager



Scotland's approval of the three commercial bluetongue virus (BTV) vaccines reassures us all.

Living with a vector-borne disease is extremely challenging but a degree of insurance should be provided for those who want to vaccinate.

The two brands available in Scotland are Bultavo and Syvazul. A third product exists called Bluevac, which is unlikely to be available due to supply issues.

From the outset, NSA's position has been to urge flockmasters to:

1. Go through your vet as they can help weigh up the flock's risk and the implications of vaccinating and not vaccinating.
2. Manage your expectations as vaccinated animals may still become infectious or infected, but clinical signs and mortality are reduced. Costs vary according to supplier, product and timing, but members have quoted costs between £2.40 and £5 a dose.

3. Order early to help secure product. Vaccinated stock will also benefit the wider sector giving confidence to importers.

4. Assess risk through a useful calculator developed by AHDB to show the return on investment of vaccinating. There is also a decision-making tool produced by the Ruminant Health & Welfare group.

5. Report and record BTV vaccine use through the ScotEID system.

Sea eagles

Livestock advocates are working harder to raise awareness around the powerless situation where a small number of farmers and crofters are having their flocks decimated by sea eagles.

Constructive talks between NSA Scottish Region and NFU Scotland have worked through the sensibilities of language, tone, emotion and objectivity to ensure a calm and consistent agricultural voice is presented to Scottish policymakers.

Debates on sea eagle predation have evolved significantly over the past 10-15 years. NatureScot appreciates the challenges farmers face. There is no debate these magnificent birds can cause enormous financial and emotional damage in some cases, causing some West Coast and island sheep keepers to feel helpless.

NSA will be taking members to Scottish parliament this summer to deliver a reasoned, data driven, awareness raising presentation.



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Whatever you do, give it your all and be generous at giving it back

By Joanne Briggs, NSA



My younger self would never have believed I could have been so lucky to work for such a high-profile farming organisation as NSA, let alone for so long and to now be bold enough to move onwards and upwards to be Agriculture Manager for Beef, Lamb and Dairy for Waitrose.

As I sit here now, working my notice period as NSA Operations Director, equal parts sad to be leaving my NSA family and excited to be taking on a new challenge, I would love to be able to tell my younger self that farming isn't as doom and gloom as I thought it was back then. I finished secondary school in 1999 with excellent GCSE grades. I then joined YFC, the dentist removed my braces and I ditched glasses in favour of contact lenses. The resulting access to cider and boys meant my A-level grades did not live up to expectations! But what did that matter against the backdrop of BSE and foot-and-mouth? 'Do anything other than farming,' was the message from family and friends.

Resilience

I would tell my younger self that, however bad it felt in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the resilience of farmers, the unique comradery of working in the livestock sector and the cyclical nature of agricultural prosperity meant I shouldn't so easily have dismissed a career in the industry I love. Choosing a degree in English and History just because those were the subjects I did best at was, if not a bad decision, certainly a very bland one. I would tell my younger self to spend time and effort exploring things I was passionate about, to do more volunteering, work experience and soul-searching, to be less afraid of looking a fool or making a mistake – anything to avoid sleepwalking into a boring decision.

Letter to my younger self



NSA Next Generation thrives because of the enthusiasm of older NSA officeholders to share their time, expertise and advice. As the NSA team now prepares to bid Operations Director Joanne Briggs a sad goodbye, but a huge good luck as she leaves NSA after 12 years, she shares her advice to her younger self.



Joining a YFC would be top of Jo's to-do list for any aspiring young farmer.

Being miserable at university meant I learnt to take risks. Taking a year's leave of absence to do unpaid work experience for *Farmers Guardian* paved the way to my future career. Take risks would always be my advice. They don't always pay off, but you learn from mistakes as much as successes. I did go back and finish my (boring) degree. But I reckon my YFC competition experience served me better. Be it stockjudging or public speaking, the skills and confidence I learnt set me apart in job interviews, professional situations and tricky conversations.

Never use being busy as a reason to say no to something. The more you cram in the more fun you'll have, the more people you'll meet, the more skills you'll gain and the more opportunities you'll be given.

Hard work

I believe the work-hard-play-hard mantra is something that sets farming apart. I am thankful for an upbringing that gave me a good work ethic and wouldn't hesitate in telling my younger self to nurture it. It has been a great privilege to work with NSA staff and volunteers who share that ethic. Officeholders giving their time freely and employees regularly going far beyond have

inspired me personally and done great things for the sheep sector. It is impossible to list the things I have learnt at NSA, particularly from working alongside Phil Stocker as NSA Chief Executive. Phil always says the world is run by the people who turn up – and there is no better lesson to learn. Turn up. And do it with passion and dedication.

Support

I am where I am today because of the advice and support others have given me. I hope I've gotten better at paying that forward and can continue to do so. I would definitely tell my younger self to be generous when sharing time and expertise, and to not see others as a threat. From my years going to chapel as a child, I know Ecclesiastes teaches: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave." You can spend life moaning, or you can throw yourself into it all. Be it work, hobbies, friends and family, do it all with relish. I'd tell that to my younger self, to my older self and anyone else who'll listen! They say that if you find a job you love, you never work a day in your life. Let's hope my next position lives up to NSA in that respect.

NSA competitions open to aspiring shepherds

The search is on to find the talented shepherds of the future as several NSA regions will be holding NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions in the coming weeks and months.

Six of NSA's nine regions will be holding regional qualifying competitions with winners gaining a place at the prestigious national finals of the event held at NSA Sheep Event 2026 at the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire, sponsored by the Texel Sheep Society. These competitions provide keen sheep farmers aged 16-26 with the opportunity to compete, demonstrating their ability in a series of common shepherding tasks.

Generous prizes

As well as the top winners qualifying for the national finals, the competitions also offer generous prize pots thanks to sponsorship from NSA supporters including British Wool and MSD Animal Health. Herefordshire sheep farmer Tom Garlick was crowned the national Next Generation Shepherd in 2024. Tom says: "The competition included some very skilled fellow young farmers who I was honoured to compete alongside. I'd encourage any ambitious sheep farmer to go along to their regional competition and give it a go." As *Sheep Farmer* magazine arrives with members, NSA Cymru/Wales Region will have crowned its winner as its competition took place at NSA Welsh Sheep on Wednesday 21st May. Details of who took the top prizes will be shared soon. The popular NSA summer events – NSA Highland Sheep, NSA Sheep South West and NSA Sheep Northern Ireland – will also host regional qualifying competitions. These NSA Next Generation contests add to the excitement



Electric fencing is just one of the competition rounds.



Demonstrate your shearing skills.

of the regional events with visitors often being able to spectate elements of the competition on the day or the day before in Scotland.

Training days

Aside from NSA events, NSA Marches and NSA Eastern Region are looking forward to welcoming budding sheep farming enthusiasts to their stand-alone competition and training days. NSA Marches Region will put shepherds to the test on Sunday 29th June alongside a training day and farm walk. NSA Next Generation Ambassador George Ellis will host the event at his farm at Grafton, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, with his 400 Romney ewes and 60 dairy beef finishing cattle on display. NSA Eastern Region will be the last to hold its NSA Next Generation event this autumn on Saturday 6th September 2025, at the Writtle Campus of Anglia Ruskin University. Further details will be shared in the next magazine. [More about how to compete at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

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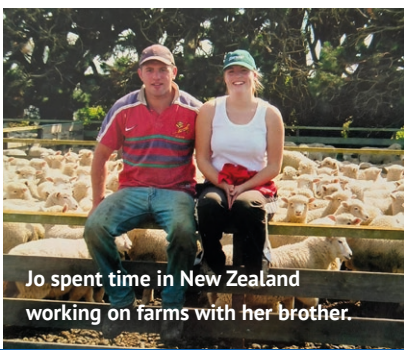
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Jo grew up on a farm in South Shropshire.



YFC competitions helped Jo gain valuable skills.



Jo spent time in New Zealand working on farms with her brother.



Farmers Guardian offered insight into a farming career for Jo.



The farm is switching to breeds more suitable for outdoor lambing.

NSA Sheep South West host focused on land, livestock and livelihood resilience

The Stanbury family are looking forward to opening their farm gates at Weston Farm, East Knowstone, Devon, for the return of the popular NSA Sheep South West in June.

Sharing their farm and their experience with visitors is something the family already enjoy with Rich Stanbury and wife Laura regularly welcoming the public.

"I like having people visit us," Rich says, "We've got so many ideas to grow this side of the business – but we are already busy on the farm – and now even busier planning for the NSA event."

When Rich returned to his family farm after travelling in New Zealand, he brought back a vision for a new way of farming at home in Devon. On formally taking over management of the farm aged 30, Rich set about reshaping the sheep and cattle enterprises, swapping concentrates for pasture, a pedigree focus for commercial efficiency, and intensive indoor lambing for a lower input outdoor lambing system. The results delivered lower input costs, healthier animals and a system that's more resilient for both livestock and family.



The family has built a reputation for their Ruby Red cattle.

By Katie James, NSA

"Dad said he'd had his 30 years of managing the farm and now it was my turn and luckily he let me get on with it," says Rich. "But change wasn't instant. At the time, fertiliser and feed were cheap, and Dad was reluctant to make big changes. I took on some diversification projects and worked off-farm, but I knew we needed a more secure system for when subsidies ended."

Lower input

The first step Rich took towards a lower input enterprise was removing concentrate feed. "Dad thought I was mad," Rich laughs. "So we split the flock post-lambing and trialled it. After three weeks, he saw the sheep weren't even touching the feed – that was the turning point."

The following year, encouraged by results, the family went fully into outdoor lambing, rotational grazing and removed concentrates pre-lambing too.

Rich did not just assess performance at lambing time. He got a grass analysis done pre-lambing to ensure ewes would receive all they needed. Having previously run North Country Mules, Suffolk and Texel cross ewes, Romneys were also introduced based on their hardy outdoor reputation.

More recently however, wool-shedding breeds – Easycare and Exlana – have become the predominant breed on farm. Rich values the cost saving these breeds are delivering. "We estimated we were spending £5,000 and 12 days a year on wool work with little return. The shedders are doing well outdoors saving us time and money," he explains.

Last year, 360 Easycare ewes went to the ram, 160 of them ewe lambs. "We also tupped another 380 ewe lambs – a mix of Mules and Texel crosses – with Easycare rams. They're not the heaviest lambs off grass, but they're fit and finish well without going overfat," Rich says.

In total the farm will have lambed in the



Rich Stanbury

region of 1,300 ewes this year, including some remaining Romney ewes.

Rich has also stopped castrating ram lambs. "I believe they grow faster and leaner without it. And realistically, I think tailing and castration won't be around much longer so we're trying to stay ahead."

The farm typically achieves a lambing percentage of around 170%. "I'd like to nudge this up, but I'm happy selling 165% with the focus on quality and consistency," he says.

Rich found lamb losses dropped significantly since the move to outdoor lambing and lameness is now under 1%. "We do cull hard," he says. "Two strikes for lameness and she's out."

Biosecurity

Rich is aiming to become a closed flock breeding all his own replacements, sourcing only rams from outside. "I'd like to form a group of local breeders with the same viewpoints so we can all produce rams for ourselves, maybe just bringing in new bloodlines once every five years or so," he comments.

"It's the best method for biosecurity in my opinion. We do so much to try and reduce worm resistance and to keep disease off farm but despite quarantine there is still a risk of introducing a problem every time new sheep come in."

Having tested their anthelmintic resistance status Rich knows the farm has some resistance to white wormers. "It's come from years ago when our standard approach, like most others, was to worm regularly regardless of need or not," he explains.

"We've found the shedders are showing more tolerance and natural resistance to worms so far. We are lucky to have never had big worm issues here and the cows certainly help with this."

Liver fluke is a more significant issue for the farm located in a high rainfall area sitting at 1,000ft (300m) and receiving 1,500mm of rainfall annually.

Lambs are weighed regularly using an advanced mobile handling system "We use this as our main indicator of worm burden. Our aim for lamb growth is 300g/day at peak times. Anything under 180g gets drenched. We do FEC test sometimes but find daily liveweight gain is a reliable guide," says Rich.

The farm has reintroduced dipping to combat external parasites reducing the need for pour-ons.

Herbal leys

Around 50% of the farm's own 500 acres (200ha) is now in herbal leys. Rich says: "We've also just taken on 100 acres (40ha) on a five-year tenancy and rent another 100 acres (40ha) annually. I'd like to put more of that into herbal leys too."

Mob grazing is central to Rich's system. He adds: "We're growing 50–60% more grass since we stopped set-stocking. Lambs move daily when finishing, never spending more than three days in a spot. Cows are moved frequently too."

"We've found the benefits of this to be clear: reduced worm burdens, better pasture, improved soil and a resurgence in plant and insect diversity. We've created our own herbal ley in some fields just through management."

Manure goes back into the soil, improving grass growth and, in turn, feeding livestock. Rich says: "It's a loop. Healthy soils mean healthier animals."



Healthy soils mean healthier animals. We're not feeding the world, but the people we do feed are getting better food."

Rich Stanbury



Rich is looking to put rented land into herbal leys.

We're not feeding the world, but the people we do feed are getting better food."

The farm's cattle enterprise currently stands at around 400 head, with 150 cows calved each year, including a pedigree herd of Ruby Red cattle. The farm finishes all cattle itself. Cows and calves are outwintered using bale grazing and moved frequently to minimise mess. Rich admits they can still tear up the ground but says it's no worse than sheep on cover crops. "We go in after, cultivate and direct drill herbal leys with peas and barley. It breaks up any compaction and resets the field," he explains. The herd also grazes 360 acres (145ha) of common land in summer.

Diversification

The farm finishes all lambs to deadweight for processor ABP. Rich says: "We'd like to support the live market more, but it's tough unless you've got bigger lambs. The abattoir is convenient for us as we can just load them up and go."

Direct meat sales have also been part of the farming business for the past 20 years and the family would like to increase sheepmeat sales "But with rising sheep numbers, it's hard to scale lamb sales direct to the public," Rich says. That said, diversification continues. Rich and Laura are setting up a classroom to host school visits,

pop-up restaurants and on-farm events. "We've got a million ideas – but just keeping up with the farming is enough most days."

Looking ahead Rich believes the farm can accommodate a further increase in sheep numbers. "That's not something I imagined ten years ago," Rich admits. "I wasn't a fan of sheep back then – lambing felt like a prison sentence. But outdoor lambing has changed everything. Now I've got confidence in the system and it's scalable."

"Ultimately, our goal is resilience for land, livestock and livelihood. I'm grateful for what the generations before me built, but I want to leave the place better still. I don't take any of it for granted. We lost everything once to foot-and-mouth disease so I know how quickly it can go."

See page 8 for NSA Sheep South West preview.

Farm facts

- The family's sheep and beef enterprise totals 500 acres of owned land, plus additional rented and common grazing.
- The farm has moved to a low input outdoor lambing system.
- Shedding breeds now make up the majority of the farm's 1,300 ewes.
- Weston farm will host NSA Sheep South West on Wednesday 25th June.



Shedding breeds are saving the family both time and money.



The flock is housed on slats rather than straw bedding.

Routine and an eye for detail are key to Northern Ireland farm success

By Katie James, NSA

The quality livestock on display at the host farm of NSA Sheep Northern Ireland will be a clear display of the meticulous stockmanship of Alwyn McFarlane and his family at their home near Dungiven, County Londonderry.

From the formulation of feed rations to following a strict calendar of dates for shepherding tasks, Alwyn describes the running of the farm as systematic to ensure the enterprise operates smoothly.

The sheep and beef farm totalling 860 acres (350ha) of lowland and hill ground is home to the Benbradagh flock of 1,100 North Country Mules

and 250 Scottish Blackface ewes with which the family has built a good reputation for breeding stock. Ewe lambs are sold from August onwards both privately and through livestock markets.

The North Country Mule remains the breed of choice for Alwyn. "We've tried other crossbred ewes but the Mule works for us, she's productive and milky. I also like to look at a group and see them all looking the same. For example, I wouldn't mix the Blackies and the Mules in the same field."

Selective breeding

Alwyn chooses Texel tups for the commercial ewes, sourcing them from local breeders or sales in Ballymena and Kilrea. "I like a tup with a sharp head and a nice body, skin and muscle, but nothing too big," he comments.

"We are known for our Texel Mules now," adds Alwyn. "They are very popular again and we find the growth rate good to push our ewe lambs on ready for the first breeding sales of the year. But we do also use a Charollais tup to sweep up after the Texel. I find them to have high fertility and are full of life, always looking for ewes to serve, so ideal for that job."

Mule gimmers, sourced from local markets, are bought in ahead of tupping. Alwyn says: "We used to run more Blackie's to produce our own replacements, but found we were keeping all ewe lambs, whether they were what we wanted or not. "So we changed the system. We trialled buying in ewe lambs but have found just buying them in as gimmers is now suiting us the best."

After scanning, sheep are dipped and then twin bearing ewes are housed on slats with singles kept out on grass until shortly before lambing.



Alwyn McFarlane and his family.

Triplets are housed on straw as Alwyn finds their additional weight can impact comfort if housed in this way.

Alwyn rates the use of slatted floors for the improved cleanliness they can offer over traditional straw bedding systems. "The sheep are cleaner and at lambing all fluids are immediately gone reducing the risk of infection. We've also found lameness reduced since using the slats and it is beneficial to preserve more of our grazing for post lambing," he says.

Balanced nutrition

Sheep are fed a total mixed ration during housing including a blended feed with protein levels of up to 19% pre-lambing and chopped silage. The mixed ration is offered in front of the ewes all day long. "We've found this ensures the ewe gets what she needs. She can choose when to feed and in every mouthful she gets a correct balance of nutrition. We now have very few ewes develop twin lamb disease as I believe they can regulate their energy intake better. We also have fewer prolapses," Alwyn explains.

The system has used a feed mixer wagon for the past six years and find it to be far more efficient on time. "I would always choose this method of feeding now over separate silage and concentrate feed," he adds.

Singles are kept outside until just a week before lambing and are offered a small amount of feed from a few weeks beforehand to help ensure good milk production for adopting on triplets.

The Scottish Blackface flock is run on the Benbradagh hill, rising to 1,526ft (465m) year round only descending to lower ground for lambing. Round bale silage is offered to ewes on the hill.

Aside from the farm's small pedigree Texel and Alwyn's wife Joanne's Border Leicester flocks, the main commercial ewes lamb in two batches from the second week in March and the beginning of April, followed by the Blackie flock.

Lambing percentages are now consistently around 200-210% but the farm has experienced issues in the past. Alwyn explains: "Lambing percentage dropped back some years ago from approaching 200% to 185%. We blood tested and found toxoplasmosis so we started vaccinating and the scanning percentage soon increased.

In addition, we now vaccinate against enzootic abortion as well as clostridial and pasteurella diseases. The whole flock is scanned for Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma too.

"I always look into any ongoing issues with the sheep, especially unexpected losses – but I never tell the laboratory what I think it is as more often than not that is what will be written on the report."

Pedigree stock

Alwyn and Joanne are supported at lambing time by children John and Charlotte, as well as Alwyn's father Mervyn and a local part time worker.

After lambing ewes and lambs are quickly turned out. "We don't feed much after lambing though," adds Alwyn, "mostly just feed buckets and they have plenty of grass. I don't like feeding once outside as I find it encourages ewes to run away from their lambs after the feed bag causing mismothering."

Tup lambs are kept entire as Alwyn appreciates the additional weight it can help them gain and he values the good market for entire males around religious festivals.

When the early Mule ewes are weaned, Alwyn removes all cull ewes, returning the remaining ewes to the hill where they will stay until pre tupping. The same will happen with the later lambing ewes. Alwyn says: "The hill keeps the ewe's bellies full, something I think is important for good welfare, but with the grazing being less nutritious they won't be over fat. Then when they come off the hill three weeks before tupping the flush on the better grass definitely helps improve fertility."

Lambs are not creep fed until five or six weeks before being sold. "It just gives them that final push and bloom ready for sale," Alwyn comments.

Around 90% of the ewe lambs are sold for breeding with the first ewe lamb sale at Ballymena market, the target for which lambs will ideally be ready. "We've built up a good customer base for the ewe lambs – every year we see the same faces returning so we are confident they are doing well for them," Alwyn explains.

Tup lambs will all be sent for slaughter, apart from those from the Border Leicester and Texel pedigree flocks where some ram lambs will be selected.

The decision on whether tup lambs are sold finished or as stores is influenced on the yearly grass growth. "If we have surplus grass and trade is good then we will finish all we can, otherwise we are happy to sell as stores. Store trade has been good in recent years" comments Alwyn. Lambs are usually sent both live and deadweight.

Hosting events

The family are use to opening their farm to visitors having hosted dog trials, young farmer events and an annual charity stockjudging event raising several thousand pounds. They are now in the final stages of readying the farm to host NSA Sheep Northern Ireland 2025 too.

Agreeing to host the event, Alwyn jokes: "I didn't answer the phone to Edward (Adamson)

for three months. But we are now looking forward to it. You have to take the opportunity to get involved with things like this when they come along." Alwyn and Joanne also agree it will be nice for their children to get involved.

Alwyn says: "I would have said there was no future for our, and other children, in farming 10 years ago. But today I think there are more opportunities and more positivity. In the last six or seven years there are better profit margins in livestock with stock achieving prices they should.

"That is as long as the suppliers of our commodities, such as fertiliser and feed, don't take advantage. I think there is a good future, but that doesn't mean you can take your eye of the ball and take it for granted."

[See page 9 for NSA Sheep Northern Ireland preview.](#)



Alwyn's champion Mule ewe, Antrim Show winner in 2024.



A Border Leicester flock is run by wife Joanne.

"I think there is a good future, but that doesn't mean you can take your eye of the ball and take it for granted."

Alwyn McFarlane

Navigating policy volatility by building resilience in grazing livestock systems

By James Bush, GSC Grays

Recent shifts in environmental funding schemes have underscored the need to reassess reliance on government subsidies and place greater emphasis on resilience.

The abrupt closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and the recent temporary withdrawal of capital grants have highlighted the volatility inherent in public support frameworks and the risks associated with heavy dependence on government support.

While public funding has historically supported farm incomes, its uncertain future alongside reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme, mean long-term business models must function independently of these mechanisms.

Some livestock enterprises still in receipt of environmental payments have begun reallocating income toward advisory services and strategic planning reflecting concerns future schemes may be significantly less well funded.

SFI learnings

Though the removal of SFI has caused frustration, it is essential to recognise the long-term benefits emerging from engagement with such schemes. For many, SFI introduced valuable practices to strengthen business sustainability and should not be abandoned due to the loss of financial incentives.

Grazing systems have seen improvement through the adoption of practices such as herbal leys and legumes in grassland, as well as rotational grazing. These measures, originally incentivised by SFI, contribute directly to soil

health, pasture resilience and overall enterprise efficiency.

Nitrogen-fixing plants reduce the need for synthetic fertilisers, while certain herbs offer mild anthelmintic properties supporting internal parasite control.

These natural functions create systems that are economically and environmentally sustainable, further contributing to long-term resilience and reduce exposure to market fluctuations in fertiliser and veterinary medicine prices.



Introducing clover into swards may help reduce feeding costs.

Rotational grazing systems, when implemented effectively, help maintain forage availability throughout the year. This reduces pressure on conserved forage and supplementary feed, easing cash flow, while offering consistency in nutritional intake.

One of the highest operational costs in livestock production is winter housing and feed. Any means to extend the grazing period while reducing the housing window will yield considerable savings in feed bills, decreased labour requirements and reduced machinery and fuel usage.

Labour, whether family or hired, carries an inherent cost. Practices to reduce feeding frequency, bedding requirements or machinery use all contribute to leaner operating structures.

Agronomic benefit

Deep-rooting herbal ley species improve soil structure and drainage, enabling livestock to remain on pasture for longer without damaging soil integrity. During periods of heavy rainfall, well-structured soils also support better surface conditions, reducing poaching and the need to bring animals indoors prematurely.

Additionally, deeper roots provide access to moisture reserves at lower soil depths, improving drought resistance during extended dry periods — a growing concern given the increasing incidence of extreme weather events. In this context, climate resilience becomes an essential goal with soil health central to its achievement.

Rather than viewing the withdrawal of SFI and related schemes solely as a setback, it is important to extract lasting value from the insights and practices introduced during their funding. The emphasis must now shift toward voluntary adoption of these techniques, driven not by compliance, but by their inherent merit in enhancing productivity, sustainability and business independence.

Applying lessons learnt can provide a strong foundation for future grazing management if you continue incorporating the positives, regardless of any funding. Their legacy should be the promotion of adaptive, resilient and efficient farming systems, capable of thriving with or without public support.

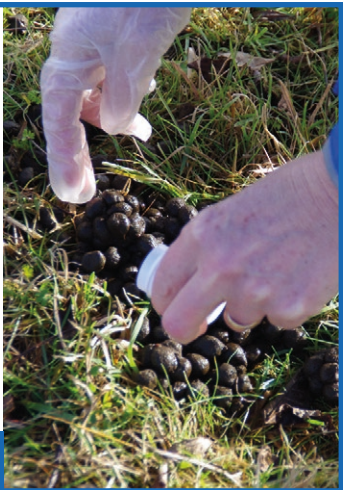


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Improved returns reflect growing market demand for British wool



With wool prices at their highest for six years and consistent demand, there is a welcome air of positivity from British Wool as we enter the new shearing season.

"Prices have improved for all our core types over the past year. Cheviot, Mule, Cheviot cross and medium types each achieved average selling prices of more than £1.20/kg this season. Swaledale and Welsh Mountain types have also seen better prices reaching around 60p/kg in recent sales. Almost twice the price achieved twelve months ago," says Andrew Hogley, British Wool.

"The average price for all types of wool reached £1.01/kg in the 2024 season, an increase of almost 20p/kg above the average price in 2023. We know there is still more to be done to deliver sustainable wool prices adding value beyond the cost of shearing, but with improved demand and price trends heading in the right direction, it puts British Wool in a stronger position for this season."



British Wool says prices are continuing to improve.

Increased demand

Interest from buyers has been strong and it now has more than 170 licensee partners translating into healthy competition in British Wool auctions. The volume of wool handled was around 7% lower last year than in 2023. The reduction in sheep numbers is a driver of this but British Wool also recognises five years of low returns has led to some utilising wool on-farm.

Mr Hogley continues: "Given the strong demand from buyers and improved returns we want to work with all UK sheep farmers to help them bring their wool to market. British Wool will be opening new collection centres over the next year and if you can work with your neighbours to get a full load together, we will arrange a free haulage to your grading depot."



Wool is graded on its style and characteristics.

Promotion

"A highlight of our marketing strategy has been the launch of a three-year collaboration between British Wool, The Campaign for Wool and Shaun the Sheep. The Shaun Loves Wool message is being used to promote wool carpets to consumers. The eye-catching promotion can be found in more than 1,500 retailers across the country.

"This year, British Wool celebrates 75 years of collectively marketing your wool clip as the only organisation in the world that collects, grades, sells and promotes fleece wool to get the best possible return for you. We are proud of our heritage and hope you can celebrate this milestone with us at one of our anniversary events this autumn.

"By building on this legacy of cooperation we can continue the progress together, creating a sustainable future for British wool with improved returns recognising the true value wool delivers to consumers."

Interested in a shearing course?

The sustainability of sheep farming is important to British Wool, which is one of the reasons it invests in shearing training and offers courses for all abilities.

British Wool is organising more than 120 courses across the UK. The two-day courses provide high-quality tuition with a low student-to-instructor ratio.

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SCAN TO FIND OUT MORE



Have you considered the ethical and welfare principles of sheep research?

By Dr Aurélie Aubry, AFBI

You hear about new medicines, vaccines and feed products, but have you thought about the safeguards and responsibilities researchers uphold when working with animals to ensure high welfare and research integrity?

Farming and scientific research have long been interlinked with many studies aiming to improve livestock systems. But, behind every study lies a clear and carefully regulated process placing animal welfare and strong ethical principles at its core.

In the UK, any use of animals in scientific research must comply with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 setting out clear rules for animal use in procedures that might cause pain, distress or lasting harm.

Three levels of licensing are required. First, individuals must be trained and hold a personal licence, which permits them to carry out regulated procedures on specific species. Second, the research itself must be covered under a project licence, detailing the aims, methods, potential harms and justifications. Finally, all work must be conducted in a licenced establishment, ensuring facilities are appropriate and maintained.

High standards

Within any licenced research establishment, an Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body (AWERB) oversees animal use. The AWERB has internal and external experts from a range of disciplines providing advice on animal welfare, housing, care routines and study design. Its central function is to consider each proposed project and carry out a harm-benefit analysis.

After AWERB approval, it is submitted to the Home Office or Department of Health in Northern Ireland for final review. This process ensures the ethical considerations are applied consistently across institutions and no project proceeds without a clear justification.

At the heart of all decisions around animal use lies the harm-benefit analysis demonstrating any potential harm to the animals is outweighed by the anticipated benefit of the research.

Beyond regulations and licensing, researchers are expected to create a culture in which animal welfare is a shared priority. This means ensuring staff feel confident raising concerns and there are clear routes for addressing

issues quickly. Staff receive thorough training and ongoing discussions through AWERB meetings, quality assurance visits and internal reviews help to build trust and encourage openness.

Care culture

Animal welfare is seen not as a box-ticking exercise. It's critical to the process, enhancing both animal and staff well-being, while providing reliable data. When livestock are involved in research, it is within a system prioritising welfare, ethics and transparency. Researchers must plan studies that minimise harm, reduce animal use and seek alternatives wherever possible. Through robust licensing, AWERB oversight and a strong culture of care, the system ensures animals are treated with respect and their use is always justified.

For you, this means any collaboration with research institutions, or participation in studies involving livestock, can be done with confidence. The welfare of the animals is safeguarded at every step and the findings generated are grounded in a responsible and humane approach.



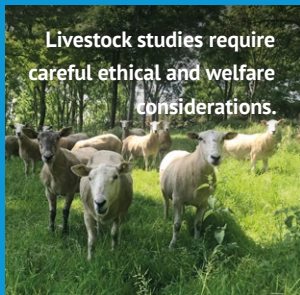
The 3R's

The principle of the 3Rs – reduction, refinement and replacement – underpins all work involving animals in research.

Replacement is to consider whether the same question could be answered using a computer model, cell culture or other non-animal approach.

Reduction is where the number used must be kept as low as possible while still ensuring data is scientifically robust.

Refinement involves making any procedures as painless and stress-free as possible, such as providing enrichment enabling natural behaviour, animal training and pain relief.



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Investing in grass management will pay dividends for finishing lambs on forage

By Bryn Hughes, Wynnstay

Providing plentiful leafy grass for lamb growth is a simple objective, which is often difficult to achieve in practise.

There is a huge range of factors affecting lamb growth and performance levels. A deficiency in any of these will reduce growth rate. But a well managed grass-based finishing system can deliver good results.

Where possible, you should target a growth rate of just below 300g/day for twins and more than 300g/day for singles. These growth rates in a March lambing flock should allow 50% of the lambs to be sold by September and 90% sold by November.

To achieve these targets grassland management needs to be excellent. Time spent on it is one of the most profitable activities on the farm with Teagasc valuing the return on grassland management at £70/hr.

Soil health

Getting the most from grass requires focusing on grass species. Ryegrass is generally the most productive in terms of quality and quantity. Soil fertility also needs to be considered. Try to achieve good pH levels – above six – and phosphate and potash levels at target indexes of two. Soil nitrogen levels play a crucial role, so using as much clover as you can, will aid management. Other factors – sunlight and moisture – are out of your control so aim to focus on the ones you can control.

Rotational grazing or cell grazing systems offer real benefits in terms of performance and grass utilisation. A ewe in peak lactation should have access to 6-8kg DM of grass so she can eat up to 3kg DM/day. This is a cover of about 2,000kg DM/ha approximately 12cm. On rotational systems this cover can be reduced to 1,200kg DM/ha approximately 8-9cm.

Key management practises to get a better return from rotational grazing systems are:

- Measuring grass growth weekly.
- Rotating on an 18 to 21 day interval.
- Removing paddocks out of the system if growth outstrips demand.
- Aim to begin grazing at 8cm and leave a paddock at 5cm residual sward height from May and a 6cm residual from July onwards.

Careful management of the system is required but the results can be excellent with high growth rates and good weights at weaning. Not all farms are suited to these systems but some principals can be deployed to good effect. Resting fields and maintaining covers above 6cm for example, will help grow more grass and improve performance from the flock.

Lamb growth rates on different feeds.

Feed	Energy level (ME/kg/DM)	Lamb growth (g/day)
Ewe milk	13	300+
Lamb creep	12.5	300+
Excellent quality pasture	12	300+
Good quality pasture	11	200+
50% dead little clover	9	0
Dead stem	7	-200

Optimal growth

Targeting poorly performing fields for rejuvenation or reseeding also pays dividends as new seeds can outgrow old leys twofold. You should know the fields lambs perform well in and the fields they don't so target these fields.

Make sure you assess the composition of the sward. If ryegrass has fallen below 40%, target the field for reseeding. Ryegrass is easily recognised as it has a red base of the stem. Reseeding can be difficult so take a few steps to improve your success.

First, soil test and correct any deficiencies. Dessicate existing vegetation and remove any decaying residue. The decaying vegetation will suppress seedling growth. Spring harrowing or rotavating are often successful methods for

breaking this layer. Using a pioneer crop, such as roots or brassicas, also works.

Consider a nurse crop. Under sown cereal crops work well and produce useful forage while allowing the grass ley to become established. If applicable, use new clover safe herbicides once the grass and clover have grown to the correct stage. Treatment of seedling weeds is effective and has been proven to extend the life of new leys. Finally, seedling leys respond well to fertilisers and a well-timed application can often make a big difference to a ley struggling to establish.

The potential for your farm to grow grass depends on many factors some of which are in your control, some are not. Work on your grass management skills and it will pay dividends.



Knowing your soil type will help you to grow better grass.

Aussie adventure for HCC Scholar to explore anthelmintic challenges



Every year, HCC offers ambitious individuals from within the Welsh red meat sector a scholarship to explore the world and its wide-ranging red meat production and processing systems.

A recent recipient of the HCC Scholarship was Tudor Roderick, a sheep farmer from the Brecon Beacons. He chose Australia as his destination and studied the concept of breeding sheep for better resistance to worms.

Mr Roderick explains: "The Welsh sheep industry faces numerous challenges, including policy, trade and the environment. There is also increasing pressure to reduce reliance upon and resistance to anthelmintics. I was keen to investigate new ideas and techniques that could be replicated on our farm and across the sheep industry."

With a large sheep flock and an extensive performance recording system, Australia was an obvious choice for Mr Roderick. He says: "They have issues with resistance to drench, particularly in the Merino breed. Sheep are therefore wormed more regularly, which has led to a resistance to wormers."

Mr Roderick was keen to see if breeding sheep for low worm burdens could be another tool to help prevent resistance in the UK.

His four-week trip included 18 stops on farms, stud flocks and a sale yard. Mr Roderick adds: "I met a range of inspiring farmers with different ideas for keeping worm burdens low. Farmer John Keilor, who has 8,200 lambs, suggested farmers should make one decision per year based on genetic data to influence the genetic direction of a flock."

Innovation

"Another farmer focused on labour efficiency and invested in state-of-the-art handling facilities, while one used an artificial intelligence system to structurally score ram lambs. Stud breeder Jamie Heinrich

– who founded the White Suffolk breed – placed a huge emphasis on biosecurity to prevent footrot being brought in."

One farmer who reared sheep on 3,000 acres (1,215ha) over two blocks used clean grazing as a way of reducing drench usage, as well as an extremely strict culling policy leading to a more resilient flock.

Mr Roderick observed the stud farms were breeding non-mulesed Merino sheep. He explains: "This is viewed as a cruel process so many farmers are breeding sheep plainer bodied. It was interesting to hear how they focused on growth and fertility rather than solely on wool production."

The trip was also an opportunity to investigate new sheep industry trials, including a protein injection resulting in wool loss. He says: "This trial seems an innovative way to eradicate the need for shearing with increased costs and difficulty finding shearers. It will be interesting to see how this trial progresses and if they find a solution for harvesting the wool."

Mr Roderick viewed impressive infrastructure including laneways connecting fields. "Confinement feeding systems are popular to give large areas of land a rest in dry periods, as well as sheep handling systems

designed to lift sheep off the ground," he adds.

"In Australia, scale allows for better labour efficiency. They run a much higher stocking rate per labour unit than we'd ever be able to do in this country as their land is usually in one block."

Resilience

Despite the difference in scale, Mr Roderick feels lessons can be learnt from farmers down under. "They are less tied to their land and systems and are more in tune with using data to make informed decisions."

"Stud breeders focus on the traits that breed more resilient sheep. There is real power in the Australian sheep genetics database system giving farmers confidence when buying sheep for their farms."

"The Australian approach of breeding for better resilience than resistance could be replicated to a greater extent here in Wales."

More on scholarships on the HCC website.



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UK-OVL-240700001



Aim to minimise stress at weaning for both ewes and lambs.

Effective approaches to disease prevention at weaning time

Weaning can be a stressful time for both ewes and lambs and with additional stress, comes in increased risk of disease.

Weaning should be guided by ewe BCS, how much feed is available and lamb growth rates, but be flexible and recognise the best time to wean might change each year.

Recovery

Getting ewe body condition right post-weaning can be tricky. It's generally a good idea to aim for a BCS of 2.0-2.5 in both upland and lowland breeds. If they are over-conditioned, then ewes can be placed on poorer pasture or grazed tightly after weaning. If underconditioned, then place ewes on good quality swards to allow them to

gain enough condition before tupping. It takes ewes six to eight weeks to gain a BCS, even on good quality grass.

Consider investigating underlying health issues, such as Johne's disease, maedi visna and liver fluke, if large numbers of very thin ewes are present with clinical signs outlined in the table. If in doubt, speak to your vet and test thin ewes at weaning.

Moving lambs onto any completely novel feed during the stressful period immediately post weaning can trigger losses due to clostridial disease or pasteurellosis. When weaning, move lambs to a familiar pasture out of sight and sound of the ewes. Introduce any new feed before weaning or after they have settled.

Precautions

It is important to remember to worm if required – check using faecal egg counts – and vaccinate lambs around weaning. Giving these products shortly before weaning may help reduce losses caused by the additional stress of gathering. Lambs will need two injections of a clostridial vaccine several weeks apart to be fully protected and ideally both done before weaning occurs.

A pre-weaning worming dose is an excellent opportunity to use either an orange (group 4-AD) or purple (group 5-SI) wormer containing the

Disease facts and symptoms.

Johne's disease	Maedi visna	Liver fluke
Older ewes >3 years usually affected, but can be much younger	Older ewes >3 years usually affected	All ages affected
Good appetite but poor condition	Pneumonia	Diarrhoea
Poor fleece	Progressive weakness	Swelling under the jaw
Diarrhoea possible	Arthritis	Pale gums and eyes
Swelling under the jaw	Chronic mastitis	

newer categories of anthelmintics. Using these products mid-season can clear out resistant worms. They may be more expensive, but resistant worms could be far more costly in terms of reduced weight gain and losses over time.

Immunity

Vaccination against pasteurellosis is important in lambs as this is a common cause of sudden death or pneumonia. Outbreaks can be caused by stress at weaning. Remember passive immunity achieved by lambs through colostrum only lasts a few weeks and can vary between two and twelve weeks depending on the vaccines given to ewes. Giving lambs their own clostridial/pasteurella vaccine is important as it will help protect them as maternal immunity wanes.

If vaccine availability issues occur, your vet will be able to advise what specific product would work best on your farm, depending on disease history and risk factors.



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Ewes need time post weaning to recover and get into peak tupping condition.



Setting up for success and integrating regenerative methods at weaning time

Weaning time is a critical stage for lamb growth and health, as well as allowing the ewes time to recover and set themselves up for another productive year.

Weaning traditionally happens between 12-16 weeks of age, but this date should not be set in stone. Instead of a fixed date in the diary it should be an informed decision, made considering a variety of factors. It's also worth investigating how to start incorporating more sustainable, regenerative methods into the weaning process to promote long term flock health, improve soil condition and reduce medicine use.

I'd recommend you start monitoring ewes and lambs from eight weeks of age. Lamb growth rate, grass availability and ewe body condition score all influence the optimal time to wean and as these fluctuate each year, so should the date of weaning. Weaning too late can have a negative impact on lamb growth and the ewe's ability to recover body condition prior to tupping.

Stress will have a negative impact on feed intakes in lambs, suppressing growth rates and immunity. This could mean lambs are more susceptible to diseases, such as pneumonia and worms, requiring more medicine usage. Therefore, where possible minimise the social disruption of weaning.

Reduce stress

Implementing fence-line weaning, where lambs and ewes are separated by a fence but remain in close proximity, may help to reduce stress. Keep lambs in established social groups to minimise anxiety. Regrouping of lambs based on weight and sex can be done once the stress of weaning has passed. All handling and moving should be done with minimum stress inflicted upon the lambs. This is where a good handling system and skilled, patient stockmanship will have a big impact.

Stress related immune suppression will affect how lambs respond to medications. Vaccines given at a time of stress will not be as effective, potentially leading to a greater risk of disease.

Strive to have high quality pasture available for lambs to move onto post weaning, maximising growth rates and immunity. Planning swards with a more measured approach can make a real difference. A diverse sward including clover, chicory, plantain, lucerne, yarrow and birdsfoot trefoil can have multiple benefits including high energy and protein profiles to promote growth and immunity. Additional condensed tannins that increase protein absorption may help with a worm challenge and deep taproots bring up essential minerals and trace elements. Speak to your seed merchant or consultant for advice.

If pasture quality and availability is poor, consider purchasing supplementary feed. This clearly presents a cost to the business but prevents lambs eating into forage allocated for ewes to regain BCS prior to tupping, initiating a vicious cycle hard to escape. The other option when forage supply is compromised is to sell some lambs store.

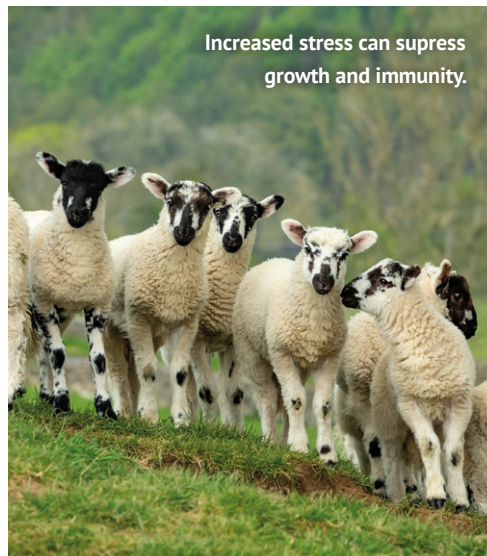
Provide shelter

Silvopastoral systems may also offer benefits on your farm. The addition of trees and shelterbelts provide shade and wind protection reducing stress, as well as providing an alternative source of forage. Trees such as willow can be a source of trace elements as well as making up some of the energy and protein requirements of the diet. Lime, ash and mulberry also provide a good source of condensed tannins. Grant funding may be

available for implementing these systems.

Worms are likely to present the biggest health challenge to weaned lambs. In an ideal world, finishing lambs should only be grazed on low-risk pastures, such as pastures that have not had sheep on for more than 12 months. This requires significant planning, in addition to utilising other livestock and land use as part of a rotation. Pastures that have had ewes and lambs on in the same season would be considered high risk.

Utilising weaned lambs in a leader-follower grazing rotation can be beneficial as lambs can selectively graze the best leaves, leaving the remaining pasture for dry ewes (or cows) to mop up worm eggs.



Increased stress can suppress growth and immunity.

Factors influencing weaning.

Factor	Wean	Don't wean
Ewe BCS	2.0	>3.0
Grass Availability	Poor	Good
Lamb Growth Rate	<200g/d	>200g/d
Lamb Age	>12 weeks	<10 weeks

When using high-risk pastures, worm burdens should be monitored using worm egg counts and treatment only initiated when required to those that need it. The decision to worm should be based on the egg counts, lamb performance and grazing history. It is important to note as a rough rule 80% of worms will be found in 20% of sheep. Therefore, we can target our treatment rather than taking a blanket approach.

Where regular weighing is happening, aim to treat only lambs not achieving a certain weight gain, for example <200g/d. Alternatively if this is not possible, aim to leave >20% of the best performing lambs untreated. This will reduce medicine usage, help promote soil health and slow development of wormer resistance. Keep a record of worm egg counts to help plan risk as lambs return to previous paddocks on a rotation.

Nutrition

Using a species rich sward for weaned lambs will also reduce the requirement for wormers by utilising natural anthelmintic properties and boost protein intakes.

Trace elements – such as cobalt, selenium and copper – are vital for lamb growth and immunity. Deficiencies can be a result of high growth rates or monoculture grassland.

Blood sampling can aid diagnosis but should be done alongside soil and forage analysis for the most accurate results. Where deficiencies are found, these can be corrected using boluses or drenches. But be cautious of exaggerated claims on some products. For independent advice speak to your vet or adviser.

Using mixed species swards with a variety of root depths will ensure all available nutrients from the soil are tapped into. Reducing tillage, cover cropping and monitoring soil health will boost soil fertility too. Therefore, adopting some more regenerative methods may reduce the need for commercial supplementation.

Effective weaning management begins with measurement. With all recording, don't get overwhelmed if you don't have the data to hand, just choose a few key things you are able to record that will make the biggest impact on your farm. Key performance indicators, such as average eight-week lamb weight, average age or weight at weaning, average daily liveweight gain post-weaning and percentage of lambs sold by tupping, would be worth monitoring.

Weaning represents both a risk and an opportunity for flock health. When done correctly, it allows ewes to recover and set up well for the year ahead, while ensuring lambs are finished efficiently with minimal disease and medicine use. Timing should be flexible and responsive to the unique circumstances of each year. Finally, adopting regenerative methods alongside conventional practices can help boost lamb health, improve soil fertility and reduce the need for medication.



Varied swards can benefit sheep and soil health.



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Making the most of the five-point plan to stamp out lameness in sheep

Collaboration within supply chains can be an effective way to reduce lameness in sheep and, therefore, lower antibiotic use.

Lamb buyer Pilgrim Europe has been working with producers in its supply group and MSD Animal Health to encourage adoption of the five-point lameness plan.

One participant is David Thomas of Llanspryddid, Powys. He has reduced lameness by one-third and seen a marked drop in antibiotic use as a result.

In 2020, Mr Thomas was feeling increasingly disheartened by a seemingly constant need to treat lame sheep. With a flock of 400 Welsh Mule cross Texel ewes and 75 ewe lambs, controlling lameness had become challenging.

"Every time we gathered sheep in we needed to treat them. It was labour intensive and we were using more antibiotics than I was comfortable with," Mr Thomas recalls.

Working with the farm's vet and an adviser trained to conduct lameness assessments, the initial phase began with baselining flock lameness and determining an action plan. After this, six monthly reviews took place throughout the two-year project. Advice stemmed around rigorous implementation of all parts of the five-point plan to reduce lameness from 3.6% to a target of 2%, set by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee.

Action plan

The first action undertaken was vaccinating against footrot. Historically, all bought-in rams had been vaccinated prior to tupping, but none of the females. The new plan enrolled every animal on the farm into a vaccination program.

Mr Thomas admits being slightly reticent about the role of vaccination considering his belief the flock's main foot health challenge was contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD) – an infection not covered by the vaccine.

Dr Kat Baxter-Smith, MSD, says: "If you've got footrot, it presents the opportunity for infection with CODD. But by controlling footrot, it reduces the risk of CODD coming in."

Now all replacements are vaccinated in the autumn with two vaccination doses, six weeks apart. Ewes then receive a booster vaccination in January prior to the flock going onto fodder beet and swedes over winter.

Any lame sheep are treated promptly, although the numbers needing treatment have dropped since participating in the project.

Reduced disease carryover into the new year has subsequently helped lower the disease risk to lambs, which Mr Thomas believes are performing better as a result. Having traditionally footbathed lambs with formalin to control scald and footrot, less disease has meant this has not been necessary for the last three years.

Following advice from the farm's vet, sheep are no longer foottrimmed to lower the risk of disease spread. Mr Thomas says: "This is now unnecessary as lameness is being caught and treated earlier. Any chronically lame sheep are culled to further reduce disease pressure. It's an attitude change. Anything that's a persistent offender, I don't think twice about ear-marking for culling."

Quarantine

With disease transmission in mind, all lame sheep were run as a specific group and isolated in a separate field at the start of the project. This also facilitated easier gathering and treatment.

All bought-in rams and a small number of purchased replacement ewes have always been quarantined from the main flock for three weeks. Mr Thomas is now more selective when purchasing stock and favours ewes on a vaccination programme.



Treat even mildly lame sheep within three days of becoming lame.

As lameness incidence has reduced so has antibiotic use, which had always predominantly been used to treat lameness. Information collected by his vets as part of the business's involvement in the Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Beef and Lamb Scheme shows total antibiotic use for the farm dropped from 9.8mg/kg of lamb to 2.2mg/kg by the end of the project.

Mr Thomas stresses the sustained implementation of every part of the five-point plan has been fundamental in achieving the results. "The turnaround has been significant. The main benefit is the labour impact and saving time managing disease. Performance has improved as we're getting less lame sheep."

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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

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NSA Sheep South West Wednesday 25th June 2025

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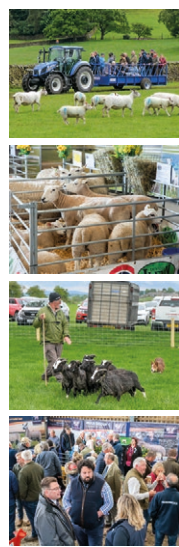
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NSA Sheep Northern Ireland Tuesday 1st July 2025

22 Gortnagross Road, Dungiven, County Londonderry.

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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.



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New vaccine developed by Moredun protects sheep against louping ill

By Charlie Burgess, Moredun  Moredun

As ticks spread geographically, new areas are at risk of significant welfare, economic and sustainability issues that have already led to the discontinuation of sheep farming in heavily impacted areas.

Louping ill is a neurological disease caused by louping ill virus. It is transmitted by the sheep tick and can infect a number of livestock, wildlife species and humans – with sheep and red grouse being particularly susceptible to infection.

The virus can cause significant mortality in all these species, with death rates of up to 50% in flocks not previously exposed to the disease. Clinical symptoms in sheep vary from mild neurological signs, such as facial twitches or body

tremors, through to more severe signs including convulsions, paralysis and death creating a huge issue in areas where ticks carry the virus.

There are currently no effective solutions for tackling louping ill in sheep. With no vaccine currently on the market keepers are reliant on using acaricides (ectoparasite dips and pour-ons) to minimise tick exposure. But the repeated doses required to deliver protection are unsustainable and have negative environmental effects.

Future prevention

Before 2017 a sheep louping ill vaccine was available, but it was withdrawn. Moredun has developed a new generation vaccine partnering with Kernfarm – a veterinary company based in the Netherlands – with the aim of bringing the vaccine to market.

The new generation vaccine works well in research trials and the next steps are to scale-up for commercial production and obtain regulatory approval from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) so the vaccine can be made available for UK sheep farmers.

Development of the vaccine for commercial use is a three-phase process.

The first phase establishes if large scale production of the vaccine will have no effect on the safety and efficacy of it. This process transfers production methods to an industrial scale and



Sheep infected with louping ill virus present with neurological problems.

validates the process proving it is sufficiently robust for commercial production.

The second phase involves studies in sheep to test the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine produced using the scaled-up process developed in the previous phase. Although the research vaccine has been shown to provide protection, the vaccine made using a scaled-up commercial process needs to be tested too. Data from these trials will be used to prepare evidence to submit to the VMD for regulatory approval.

In the final phase commercial manufacture will commence, creating stock for sale immediately after regulatory approval is granted.

Due to the niche UK market for this vaccine, the usual route to market via pharmaceutical companies has not been possible. Moredun and Kernfarm have launched an industry fundraising campaign to fund vaccine commercialisation.

Donate or read more at www.moredun.org.uk/donate-louping-ill.



The sheep tick is not confined to upland areas.

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Fells show increased losses due to tick diseases over the last 30 years

By Rod Wellford, Millcroft Vets, Matt Colston, Elanco, and Amanda Carson, retired vet

Losses to the fell have always been of concern to hill farmers but the risks are increasing as tickborne diseases become more prevalent in previously safe areas.

In the Lake District, Cumbria, sheep farmers often refer to dirty fells or fells with dirty ticks. There are many reasons for the black losses – the loss of stock on the fells – including incomplete gathers, straying sheep and death at any age.

But in 2004 farmers were concerned tick numbers were increasing and dirty ticks spreading, with flocks once free of tick-related diseases now experiencing tick-related losses.

With funding from Schering Plough and Millcroft Vets, 24 farms were visited at the clipping gather and bloods collected from Herdwick and Swaledale ewes that had been on the fell. Samples were tested for louping ill and of the 24 flocks, 15 had serological evidence of the virus equating to 63%. But the geographic distribution suggested there were uninfected areas, such as Skiddaw range between Bassenthwaite and Keswick, Cumbria.

Rising numbers

In 2014 this exercise was repeated in 25 flocks with 20 of them displaying serological evidence of louping ill, equating to 80% and previously uninfected areas were no longer safe from infection. In 2024 the same flocks were tested. This time 18 of the 23 remaining flocks (78%) were positive for louping ill virus.

Tickborne fever (TBF) was also investigated. In 2006 sheep from seven farms were blood sampled and examined for *Anaplasma phagocytophilum* – the organism that causes TBF – with evidence of the organism present on all farms. In 2014 testing continued and was detected in 20 of the 25 flocks. In 2024 only one farm remained clear of TBF, suggesting it is ubiquitous in fell flocks.

Louping ill virus causes encephalitis leading to fine muscle tremors, incoordination, convulsions and death can occur. Animals that recover are immune for life, although some may develop torticollis (twisted neck) or weakness in the legs. Ticks can also transmit louping ill to humans.

Unfortunately, there is currently no commercially available vaccine for louping ill, but Moredun are working on this – see opposite page.



Monitoring suggests previously tick-free areas are no longer safe.

Tickborne fever is of concern because infection causes suppression of the immune system, making sheep more vulnerable to other diseases including louping ill, tick pyaemia, abortion, pasteurellosis and septicaemic listeriosis.

The geographical distribution of ticks is changing largely due to the effects of climate change with warmer wetter weather. Changes to environmental management policies are also affecting tick populations. For example, sheep reductions and destocking is creating deep vegetative matts ideal for ticks or increased deer numbers boosting hosts for tick multiplication.

Management

For sustainable control of tickborne diseases we need to look at and implement control in three key areas – vegetation, wildlife and livestock management. Tick numbers are around 10 times higher in bracken compared to adjacent not bracken vegetation, so controlling tick habitats through vegetation management would reduce numbers. Deer are very good tick hosts and can feed large numbers, as well as operating as effective tick taxis, therefore better wildlife management would help reduce these risks.

Livestock treatments to prevent direct infection from tickborne diseases usually involves acaricides. Organophosphate dips are immediate and effective, offering additional protection against sheep scab, blowfly, lice and keds. Topical pour on/spot on treatments don't kill the tick immediately but are easier to apply and offer longer protection. Acaricides must also be applied correctly to be effective and must be used appropriately as they can damage soil organisms.

Livestock management can also play a critical role. Hill ewes are routinely brought off the hill for lambing. Lambs acquire some immunity from colostrum but should be treated with a pyrethroid pour-on if it's necessary to return them to the hill. Pregnant animals should never be moved from tick-free to tick-infested areas as this increases the risk of TBF and abortion. Rams should be introduced to *A. phagocytophilum*-infected tick areas as lambs to ensure they are unaffected when first used as shearlings.

For more advice access the Moredun louping ill best practice booklet through your NSA Moredun Associates membership. See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-moredun.



The risk of tickborne diseases are on the rise.

Tickborne diseases

- Louping ill – Flavi virus.
- Tickborne fever – *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*.
- Tick pyaemia – *Staphylococcal* infection.
- Lyme disease – *Borrelia burgdorferi*.
- Red water fever – *Babesia*.

Optimising plans to utilise on-farm benefits from shelterbelts

By Dr Lindsay Whistance, Organic Research Centre

Now is the ideal time to consider the positive effects trees could play on your farm ready for tree planting from late November says the Woodland Trust.

The health, welfare and performance of sheep flocks are at threat from changing and increasingly extreme UK weather patterns. Yet there is an expectation to produce food in an economically sustainable manner while helping to restore nature and reduce emissions.

Reduce losses

The Woodland Trust suggests trees may offer one solution to this problem as evidence shows trees on farms benefit flock welfare and the wider environment. For example, the presence of good shelter can reduce mortality by a third and helps establish strong ewe-lamb bonds. New-born lambs can lose up to 10°C of their body heat in the first half-hour of life. Therefore a lack of shelter increases the risk of hypothermia.

In hot weather, seeking shade is key for maintaining thermal comfort. When too hot, sheep reduce their feeding behaviour, which has a negative impact on gut health, milk quality and quantity in ewes and slows down lamb growth rates. It can also impair oestrus expression and foetal development alongside sperm production and libido in rams.

The type and extent of benefits shelterbelts can provide varies depending on their size, location, species choice and orientation. They are typically planted to reduce windspeeds in exposed conditions and, when positioned

perpendicular to the prevailing/cold wind, in-field microclimate conditions can be improved by their presence. The amount and quality of shelter gained is influenced by four main factors – profile, porosity, height and length.

Profile and porosity are key to minimising wind turbulence by lifting some wind smoothly up and over while allowing some wind to pass through the shelterbelt. The optimal level of porosity is 50% in temperate conditions.

Height plays its part by redirecting the wind upwards and the higher this is lifted, the longer it takes for the two airstreams to re-join. This extends the available shelter far beyond the shelterbelt to around 20 times its height.

Wind turbulence is also created at the ends, so a longer shelterbelt creates more shelter. Gaps can also increase wind speeds making parts of the field more exposed than when no shelterbelt is present. Similarly, too little density at ground level will lead to increased wind speeds creating a draught resulting in poorer conditions in colder weather.

Planning

To optimise shade benefits, plant large trees close to eastern and southern edges then concentrate shrubs on northern and western edges.

Some recommended designs for a shelterbelt can be up to 30m wide. While these multiple-row structures with wide between-row spacings can offer high levels of biodiversity it requires a lot of land to be lost from the productive field area.

Currently the smallest government funded width in England is 10m and in Scotland 15m, yet research carried out in the late 1990s suggests an optimal shelter – the amount of shelter gained



for the land used – is achieved with a five-metre-wide shelterbelt.

The optimal shelterbelt design consists of four rows of trees. Rows one and two face the prevailing wind and are composed of shrubs, such as hawthorn, buckthorn, hazel, spindle and guelder rose. These are spaced at 1m apart with 1.5m between rows. Rows three and four are planted with taller tree species, spaced at 2m apart with 1.5m between rows.

Intermediate trees in row three include field maple, silver birch, bird cherry, rowan and crab apple. Large trees in row four include Scots pine, common alder, aspen, black poplar and hornbeam.

There are many different designs for in-field and field-edge tree planting, such as alley planting, clustered and random planting (for example wood pasture), grid designs (for example orchards), or linear planting including hedgerows and shelterbelts. Here we have focused on shelterbelts but factsheets on alley and in-field planting are available.

Don't forget the Woodland Trust offers tailored advice on farm tree planting.

More at www.woodlandtrust.org.uk.

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Top tips for optimising forage availability within your pasture this summer

Permanent pasture varies between fields, so understanding each field better can improve forage management for grazing livestock.

Ellie Roberts, NIAB, says: "Identifying plant species within fields is an easy way to start. The best time of year to do this is around July when most grassland plants start flowering, making identification easier."

The multi-species sward app is a useful tool if grassland species identification is new to you. Mrs Roberts says: "Local wildlife trusts, advice groups, Natural England and even ecology/conservation students may be able to help in species identification. The Register of Sheep Advisers at NSA or other environmental advisers may offer additional expertise in grassland management and agri-environment experience."

"Aim to have a minimum of one grass, two legumes and two herb or wildflower species, which often include varieties of ribwort plantain

and chicory, along with white and red or alsike clover. Collectively these can produce high yields and excellent lamb growth rates along with higher trace elements and anthelmintic effects.

"Where grassland can be classed as a priority habitat – such as lowland dry acid grassland, calcareous grassland (upland or lowland), coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, lowland meadows or upland hay meadows – plans to increase productivity of any area requires application for a screening decision," she adds.

Diverse pastures

By establishing what species diversity you already have in your permanent pasture before considering a reseed may highlight areas that can be maintained as they are.

Mrs Roberts stresses the need to be cautious where environmental incentives are applicable and suggests using Defra's magic map covering multi-agency geographic information with the

Grassland advisers can help maximise forage availability, says Mrs Roberts.



ability to select multiple map layers including land designations for anyone who is unsure.

When it comes to getting the best out of existing permanent pasture, the timing and duration of grazing is key. "Recovery periods are essential, allowing plants to restock their shoot and root reserves between grazing, which is critical for productivity over a long season," she adds. Good plant recovery prevents die back so will limit opportunities for encroachment of common weeds as will preventing overgrazing and poaching, which are challenging in set-stocking situations.

Use the magic map at www.magic.defra.gov.uk.



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Following the flock

We visit Angus, North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire to catch up with NSA officeholders

Peter Myles

NSA Scottish Region Chair, Angus



Some say a sheep's one ambition in life is to die – not if I can help it.

I'd like to think the country's sheep flock has been living through the healthiest era we've had, with some of the best vaccines and preventative medicines now available. Outbreaks of pulpy kidney, blackleg and pasteurellosis for example, are rare but can happen when there is a breakdown in protection with a vaccine supply issue.

Sheep scab has returned since the stop of compulsory dipping when it was virtually eradicated. I know there are issues with organophosphates but personally I'm a great fan of them.

Wormers too have moved on. Gone are the days when one would use a white drench one year then a clear drench the next. More care is being taken regarding worm and wormer resistance to prolong the efficiency of the drugs.

Now dedicated scientists at Moredun have developed a new vaccine for louping ill. NSA Scottish Region gives full support and request people give this initiative the backing it deserves. And then I can say if a sheep's one ambition in life is to die – not if I can stop it! [Read more about the new vaccine on page 30.](#)



Ted has been busy in the livestock market at Skipton.

Ted Ogden

NSA Northern Region Chair, North Yorkshire



As farmers and producers were busy in the grip of spring lambing and calving, it was a similar story in the livestock market at Skipton.

Prime sheep sales saw the peak season for prime hogg sales with large numbers coming from winter root crops. As most will know, trade hasn't hit the headlines of last year and with winter having generally been kinder the hogs have returned in fine fettle and generally at much larger weights.

Demand for handy weight hogs has been mostly good, yielding solid returns. But the surplus of heavy hogs has dragged the trade down more than expected. Strong cull ewe prices highlight the contrast in demand for lamb and mutton in UK meat markets, likely due to reduced catering demand for large lamb carcasses. The hogg trade may improve as spring lambs come through.

Looking forward to autumn, it is possible there will be a few more gimmer hogs held over this time for the breeding sales rather than having gone in the spring, offering more choice to producers looking to replace older ewes or increase flock numbers.

If you are attending NSA North Sheep or NSA Sheep South West, please do pop along for a chat and say hello where I will be at either the NSA or CCM Auctions trade stand. Best of luck for the 2025 trading season.

Ed Brant

NSA Central Region Chair, Lincolnshire



We've followed the cover crops of brassicas, oats and vetch by sewing spring barley, fodder beet and stubble turnips.

The barley was easiest to drill and looks the best. It will be interesting to see the results. The downside is we were trialling the cover crops to see if we could meet the requirements of the Sustainable Farming Incentive before entering, so have been affected by the early closure for applications.

While lambing the mature Lleyms, we had great weather with only a couple of days rain but the nights were quite cold. It has been on the good side of average with losses being lower than recent years. We have used shedding rams and recorded the progeny alongside the usual Lleyms, so it will be interesting to see the difference when I crunch the numbers.

The ewe lambs started lambing at the beginning of May as the weather caught me out a little bit last year and caused a few losses. I have trialled moving them round the subdivisions of the paddock over lambing. The idea was if we have bad weather I could move them to more sheltered parts of the larger arable field, rather than set stock like last year.

There was some drama and heartache in the Hampshires. We had 20 ewes abort and the results came back as campylobacter. It is good to know what has been causing the issues and now I can work on a plan to deal with it for next year.



Ed has seen less losses over lambing this year.

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*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.



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