



National Sheep Association

Samuel Wharry, NSA Chairman. Report given to the NSA 2015 AGM

It is hard to believe that it is six months today since I took on the role of NSA Board Chair, and while it has been an interesting and enjoyable time for me it has certainly been a challenging period for sheep farmers generally. With extremes of weather, July has seen both the warmest and coldest days on record for the month, and depending on where you farm, either too much or too little rainfall; it has been a difficult year to manage grass.

Lamb trade, which showed such promise at the start of the season, has been extremely disappointing, to say the least. It is shocking to realise that things as diverse as the state of the Greek economy, the volatility in the Chinese stock market, and now the problems with the illegal immigrants at Calais, can have such adverse effects on the price that I receive for my lambs in the Glens of Antrim. These things are all completely out with our control, and while it is important that we concentrate on controlling our costs and producing our lambs as efficiently as possible, we must



ensure that retailers and consumers are aware that at this time of year UK lamb is at its best and most plentiful. The next few weeks are vital, not only for finished lamb sellers, but also for store and breeding stock producers in our uplands, and I can assure you that NSA will continue to highlight the importance of retailers supporting local produce.

For the NSA it has been a busy summer with no less than six separate sheep events held across the country. Attending these events is definitely the most enjoyable part of my role as Chairman. Visiting sheep farms and meeting sheep farmers across the UK gives an insight into just what a diverse and varied industry we have, and yet the one thing which is common to all our events is the enthusiasm and pride in their stock displayed by all our host farmers. I think that the success of all these events this year is due in no small part to the quality of the farms selected, and of course the hard work put in by the regional organising committees. I would just like to take this opportunity to thank everyone concerned for all their efforts, and on a personal note, to thank them for their welcome and hospitality to me.

Our Board of Directors has also had a busy year. As Chairman I inherited an ongoing process of reviewing and updating our Articles of Association. We have now been working with our new constitution for over three years, and while things have generally been working entirely satisfactorily, a few problems and anomalies have come to light which needed to be addressed. I'm sure that you are all aware of the resolutions which are to be



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voted on later. I would like to thank all the members of the Board of Directors for their input to this process. We had some robust debate, but that is how it should be, and the final resolutions reflect the democratic will of the board and I hope will help to guide the association and the office bearers forward in the future.

We have also had a challenging audit process this year. We have been aware for some time that we have had issues around our accounts and how the regions report their finances. We have had an extensive list of recommendations from our auditors and, on the advice of the F&GP Committee, we have taken these on board and agreed a number of measures which will ensure the financial health of the association and our compliance with our legal commitments.

One of the many success stories of the year has been the NSA Next Generation and Ambassadors programme. I had the privilege of meeting this year's intake at their first get together in February. After the success of last year's Ambassadors they had a hard act to follow, but I have to admit to being extremely impressed by their knowledge and enthusiasm for the sheep industry. With young people such as these I truly believe there is a bright future for sheep farming in the UK. I think it is vital that we should continue to offer them any help, advice and encouragement that we can. NSA has every right to be very proud of this initiative, and of the foresight and imagination of all our regions in agreeing to fund it so generously. It is important that we keep this project going and that these young people are encouraged to stay involved in NSA at all levels. Much of the success of whole Next Generation project is down to the hard work and energy put in to it by Joanne, and we are very grateful to her for her drive and enthusiasm.

We are now over a year into managing the Sheep Farmer magazine entirely in house. Taking the NSA flagship publication back in hand has undoubtedly been an unqualified success. One of the most common comments that I get around shows and sheep events is how much better the magazine has become, with more features of interest and use to sheep farmers, rather than just advertisements. As you will see from the accounts it has also become a useful source of income for the association, so on behalf of the entire readership and all of NSA, I would like to thank Joanne and Helen Davies for all their hard work in producing the magazine and in sourcing the adverts which help make it pay.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at Malvern for all their hard work. I think that it is only when you become involved enough to be present in the NSA offices sometimes that you realise just how much work goes into keeping the organisation running. I am always impressed at the enthusiasm and professionalism shown by all the office staff in Malvern. They are all dedicated to the getting the best outcomes for the association and I think sometimes that we tend to take them for granted, so on your behalf, thank you to all of them, and on a personal note, thank you all for keeping me right and for looking after me for the last six months. A great deal of thanks is also due to our CEO Phil Stocker. His quiet diplomacy and encyclopaedic knowledge of our industry never fail to amaze me, and the high regard that he is held in by just about everyone I meet is proof, if any were needed, of just how fortunate we are to have Phil as Chief Executive of the NSA.

Finally I must thank our Board of Directors and all the members of our various committees for all their hard work. I think that it is one of NSA greatest strengths that our officials and committee members are practical sheep farmers, who voluntarily give up their time to work for the good of NSA. Without them we simply couldn't cope, and they deserve all our gratitude.