

SCOTLAND

WORKING FOR THE SCOTTISH SHEEP INDUSTRY

SEPTEMBER 2026 EDITION

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CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The rain arrives, but so does Bluetongue.

by Alec Telfer, NSA Scotland Chair

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As I write, a gentle rain is falling outside—nothing outrageous, but very welcome. Many of the burns have dried up and have yet to flow again, although the brown knowes and gravel areas are finally beginning to green.

Here in east-central Scotland, the summer has been so dry that I nearly imposed a hosepipe ban on the cottages and houses supplied by our private spring. Yet this is nothing compared with conditions farther south. At the end of July, I travelled to the well-run NSA Sheep Event in Malvern, Worcestershire, where the latest innovations for the sheep industry were on display. The worsening landscape on the journey showed how severely the lack of rain had taken its toll: fields grew browner, vegetation appeared burnt and even the trees were struggling.

Shortly after that, in early August, we had the NSA national AGM held this year at the Moredun Research Institute, Edinburgh. This was a well-attended and the most interesting event, it was great to see Phil Stocker recognised for his outstanding contribution to the industry being awarded the Royal Smithfield Club Bicentenary Salver. It was a tricky business keeping it a secret, but it was a joy to watch the realisation sweep across Mr Stocker's face when he realised that the presentation was going to be made to him, very well deserved.

Now that the rain has finally arrived, hopefully there can be some compensatory growth in the grass sward to provide for our flocks, as the feed costs providing for stock this year will

have been absolutely horrific. I fully understand the old saying be careful what you wish for, but I also hope the temperatures continue to drop to a level where midges stop. This scourge of bluetongue virus (BTV) is having a horrible impact on our industry, already under siege from drought and dreadful political pressure. On the subject of BTV, in the announcement from the Scottish Government the Temporary Control Zone restrictions relaxed on the 10th of September. Can I ask that all our producers seriously consider booking BTV-3 vaccine; next spring, it might save us from the carnage we have seen in the southwest of England.

Moving on to more light-hearted matters, this year's Lamb for St Andrew's Day Dinner is being held at Ednam House Hotel in Kelso, this is sure to be an enjoyable celebration of lamb, and we have a couple of great speakers for the evening, namely Gordon Newlands, Quality Meat Scotland, and Scott Brown, Carrs Billington, many will also be familiar with Mr Brown from his commenting in the livestock rings at the Highland Show. I will be keeping my opening words to a minimum but most importantly I have encouraged our guest speakers to keep

things amusing and light-hearted, we are on a night out and none of us want to be listening to any 'dismal johnny stuff', we're out for a laugh. I would encourage you to get yourselves organised and book for what promises to be a good night, please get in touch with Julia Bell, NSA Scottish Region Events & Activities Officer at scotland@nationalsheep.org.uk or on: 07708 114380, she'll sort it out.

Our Events

[click here](#)

Visit NSA Scottish Region at the following events:

Scottish Smallholding & Countryside Festival 2026.

Kirkton and Auchertyre SRUC Open Day.

NSA Scotland's Lamb for St Andrews Day Dinner.

NSA Scottish Region Events and Activities

Julia Bell NSA Scottish Region Events & Activities Officer



NSA Scottish Region Lamb for St Andrew's Day Dinner

NSA Scottish Region is delighted to host its annual Lamb for St Andrew's Day Dinner on Friday 27th November 2026 at the Ednam House Hotel, Kelso. The evening will begin at 7pm and is a fitting celebration of Scotland's world-class lamb.

An annual highlight of the NSA social calendar in Scotland, dinner tickets are available now for £55/person (including VAT), but places are limited and early booking is advised. To reserve a seat, donate a raffle prize, or find out more, please contact Julia Bell, NSA Scottish Region Events and Activities Officer, by emailing scotland@nationalsheep.org.uk.

The festive dinner brings together sheep farmers, industry representatives and friends of the sector. The event celebrates the best of Scotch Lamb, the nation's thriving sheep industry and the farmers, butchers and retailers that produce an exceptional product. Guests will enjoy a delicious menu that showcases local produce and is kindly sponsored by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS).

Alongside the mouth-watering meal and good company, there will be a varied programme of entertainment and tradition celebrating Scotland's patron saint. NSA Scottish Region welcomes two guest speakers for the evening. Gordon Newlands, Brands Development Manager at QMS, will toast the wonderful Scotch Lamb. Scott Brown, Territory Manager at Carrs Billington and regular commentator for the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland (RHASS), will provide a light-hearted response, reflecting on Scotland's sheep sector. Adding a ceremonial touch to the evening, Pete Tweedie will pipe in the lamb before it is officially addressed by NSA Scottish Region Chair Alec Telfer.

NSA Scottish Region Events and Activities Officer, Julia Bell, says: "We are incredibly excited to welcome guests to this year's Lamb for St Andrew's Day Dinner. It is always a fantastic evening filled with great food, good company and plenty of opportunities to catch up with others from across the industry. Scotch Lamb will, of course, be at the heart of the celebrations, and we encourage anyone interested in attending to book soon as places are expected to fill quickly."

A highlight of the evening is the raffle, featuring an incredible selection of prizes generously donated by businesses and friends of the industry. Funds raised will support the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RSABI), the charity that provides emotional, practical and financial support to people involved in Scottish agriculture. A truly fitting cause.

Businesses, organisations and groups of friends or colleagues are encouraged to reserve a table of ten for what promises to be a truly memorable evening. Guests are invited to dress smartly with a touch of tartan, embracing the spirit of St Andrew's Day and adding to the festive atmosphere.

LAMB FOR ST ANDREW'S DAY DINNER

NSA Scotland invites you to attend our
annual dinner on Friday 27th
November at 7pm

The Ednam House Hotel, Bridge Street,
Kelso, Scottish Borders, Scotland, TD5
7HT

Contact NSA Scottish Region Activities
Officer

Julia Bell for more details
scotland@nationalsheep.org.uk

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NSA Scottish Region Policy Update

Faye Bryce, NSA Scottish Region Policy Officer



Bluetongue: acting now to protect Scotland's flocks

There are two very different issues that have dominating discussion across Scotland's rural sector over the summer. One is the continued spread of bluetongue across Great Britain. The other is the devastating wildfires that have affected parts of the Highlands this summer. While the risks are different, both highlight the importance of taking preventative action before problems escalate.

Bluetongue remains one of the most significant animal health threats facing livestock producers. The viral disease affects sheep, cattle, goats, deer and other ruminants and is spread primarily by biting midges. While it does not affect human health or food safety, it can have serious consequences for animal welfare, productivity and livestock movements. Sheep are often the most severely affected, with signs including fever, swelling of the head and mouth, lameness, breathing difficulties and, in severe cases, death. Outbreaks can also result in movement and trade restrictions, creating additional challenges for farm businesses.

The good news is that this is preventable. Scottish Government guidance is clear that vaccination is the best available method of protecting livestock against bluetongue. Vaccines are authorised for use in Scotland. Options are worth discussing with a vet as part of flock and herd health planning. As immunity takes time to develop, vaccination decisions should be made well in advance of periods of highest risk.

Evidence from affected areas elsewhere in Great Britain continues to demonstrate the value of vaccination. There is no treatment available once animals become infected, making prevention particularly important. Vets have also reported concerns around fertility and reproductive performance in unvaccinated livestock, impacts that can have lasting consequences for farm profitability.

For sheep producers, vaccination is about more than avoiding clinical disease. It helps protect flock performance, breeding outcomes and business resilience. Every farm protected through vaccination helps reduce the wider impact of bluetongue across the industry.

NSA Scottish Region is also aware of concerns around vaccine availability. As interest in vaccination has increased, so too has demand. Future production levels will depend heavily on manufacturers having clear evidence that farmers want access to vaccine. For that reason, NSA Scottish Region is encouraging producers to contact their veterinary practice and register their interest, even where supplies may not currently be available.

Veterinary waitlists provide a direct signal of demand to manufacturers. The more intentions to vaccinate that are registered, the stronger the case for increased production and distribution. Joining a waitlist

is therefore not simply about securing a future supply for your own flock. It also helps demonstrate the level of demand that exists across Scotland and supports efforts to increase vaccine availability for the wider industry.

Alongside disease prevention, recent events have also highlighted the importance of preventative action in Scotland's uplands. The large wildfires seen across parts of the Highlands this summer have caused substantial environmental damage and placed significant pressure on emergency services. In response, NSA Scottish Region has written to MSPs calling for a serious and evidence-based discussion about wildfire prevention, upland management and the implementation of the new muirburn licensing regime.

There is a growing concern about land management approaches that have reduced grazing livestock on some areas of hill ground. Sheep play an important role in managing vegetation and reducing fuel loads that can contribute to wildfire risk during prolonged dry periods. Alongside grazing, controlled muirburn has long been used as a practical land management tool by those with extensive local knowledge and experience.

NSA Scottish Region has highlighted concerns that aspects of the forthcoming licensing regime could create barriers for those carrying out responsible muirburn, particularly where experienced practitioners face additional costs and training requirements. NSA Scottish Region have asked policymakers to carefully consider the practical implications of the legislation in light of the lessons learned from this summer's fires.

The common thread running through both bluetongue and wildfire prevention is the value of acting early. Whether it is vaccinating livestock before disease pressure increases or maintaining active land management to reduce wildfire risk, prevention is almost always more effective than responding after the event. NSA Scottish Region will continue to work with government, MSPs and industry partners to ensure that practical experience and evidence remain at the centre of decision making, while raising the profile of measures that help protect sheep farmers and the wider rural sector.



NSA SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER

Remember to have a look at the previous editions of the NSA Scotland Newsletter on our website.

[Click here](#)



FarmStrong

Three sheep farmers, three journeys, three wellbeing tips

Every farmer and crofter has their own story of challenge and change. For Young Farmer Beth Farmer that meant walking away from elite curling to pursue a full-time career in sheep farming. For social media sensation, Nicola Wordie, the focus was navigating grief while continuing to help run the family farm. And for farm health and safety ambassador Callum Lindsay, the challenge was adapting to a new normal following a life-changing quad bike accident.

Despite their different experiences, all three have discovered that looking after your wellbeing doesn't require a lifestyle overhaul but, often, it's the small things done consistently that make the biggest difference.



Beth Farmer – Choosing her own path

Kinross-shire shepherd Beth Farmer was on a pathway towards the 2026 Olympics before deciding that sheep farming was what she wanted to do. Walking away from competitive curling was not a decision she took lightly,

but trying to balance farming alongside five-days-a-week training was becoming a challenge. Choosing to become a full-time shepherd was a weight lifted from her shoulders and opened the door to new opportunities.

Becoming more involved in Young Farmers helped fill the gap left by competitive sport, providing fresh challenges, strong social connections and a sense of community. During her time as Chair of Kinross JAC, Beth was runner-up in the 2024 SAYFC Young Farmer of the Year competition.

"Stepping up in young farmers has been a big help in making that transition and I have been determined to take every opportunity that presents itself."

Beth's tip: Push yourself out of your comfort zone.

"Whether it's Young Farmers, breed societies, NSA activities, local discussion groups, or something entirely different – embrace opportunities and push yourself to do something new. I wasn't sure about entering Young Farmer of the Year but ended up taking the runner-up spot, meeting lots of new people and going on to secure a place on a study tour to Texas."



Nicola Wordie – Stepping back and taking notice

Aberdeenshire farmer Nicola Wordie knows how quickly life can change. Just days after getting engaged, she lost her mother unexpectedly. *"We lost a much-loved part of our family and a huge asset to the farming business, and it still requires some getting used to."*

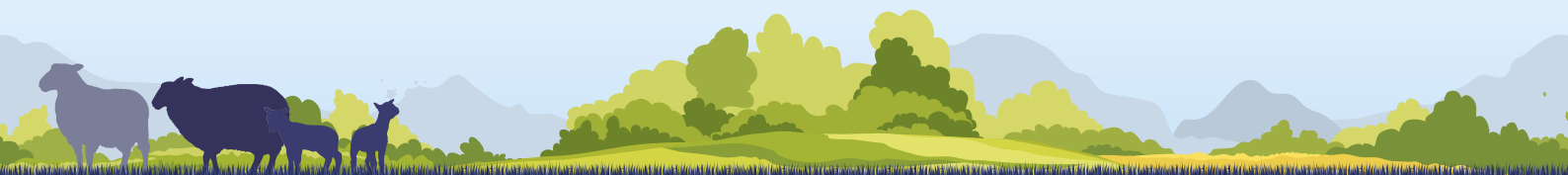
It was during this difficult time that Nicola became even more aware of the importance of looking after her wellbeing. Alongside leaning on family and friends, she has developed simple habits that help her maintain perspective. Whether

it's going to the gym, volunteering with the RNCI, or stopping to admire the livestock she's worked hard to rear, Nicola believes taking time to notice what's going well can make a real difference.

"I regularly stop for five minutes in the day to just take notice of the livestock. Not only to check that they're all happy and healthy, but because it gives me that sense of pride to look at them and think, gosh, that's my hard work paying off."

Nicola's tip: Slow down and step back to appreciate every achievement – have pride in your work.

"Take five minutes each day to appreciate what you've achieved. Whether it's healthy lambs playing, or simply getting through a busy day, recognising the positives can help build resilience."





Callum Lindsay – Small steps, big impact

When Callum and Zara Lindsay moved to Arran to take on a farm tenancy in 2023, they were excited to begin a new chapter, to farm in their own right. But just five months later, everything changed when Callum suffered a serious quad bike accident that left him with life-changing injuries and a long recovery from a brain injury.

One of the biggest challenges was the uncertainty. *"No one can tell you how long recovery will take. If you break a bone, generally you know in six or eight weeks it will have healed and normality will resume, but with a head injury it's different. Nobody can give you that timeline."*

What eventually helped was not one major breakthrough, but a series of small, positive habits. *"It took a while to see that it was the little things making the most difference. To pass time I started to take photos. I would*

then look back on ones from a few weeks or months before and I could see the change in the season, the progression on the farm and at the same time, in my recovery. Those things gave me a real boost - small positives, but they kept me motivated."

Callum's tip: **Focus on progress, not perfection.**

"You're never going to change anything big overnight but small steps, looking back at where you were, appreciating what's around you - those things add up. I love looking back through photos to see progress I might not have noticed."

Completely different circumstances brought different challenges for Beth, Nicola and Callum, but their experiences show that wellbeing isn't about making dramatic changes. It can be found in the everyday moments – enjoying that first cup of tea, taking pride in healthy livestock, catching up with friends, going along to a Young Farmers meeting, getting involved in your community, or just reflecting on how far you've come.

To read Beth, Nicola and Callum's stories in full and find out more about the five ways to wellbeing, head over to the Farmstrong Scotland website at

www.farmstrongscotland.org.uk





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NSA Policy Update

Michael Priestley, NSA Policy Manager



Keeping the gate open: A pathway for the next generation of sheep farmers

Scotland has no shortage of policies designed to support farming or encourage young people into agriculture. The challenge, increasingly, is getting young people onto commercial-scale farms in the first place.

For NSA, this matters enormously. Sheep farming is not simply an economic activity. In Scotland's uplands it is part of the fabric of rural communities, landscapes and land management. Yet sheep numbers have been under sustained pressure. Breeding ewes stood at 2.47 million in 2025. For context, there were three million breeding ewes in Scotland in 1900, and Scotland's population was around a million lower than it is today.

Behind those numbers are farms closing, flocks contracting, skills being lost and hills becoming less populated.

Taxpayers already support the sector in many ways:

- Basic Payment Scheme (no longer available in England and being phased out in Wales).
- Young Farmer Payment provides an additional payment for eligible farmers under 41.
- Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) recognises the challenges of farming in constrained areas.
- Scottish Upland Sheep Support Scheme.
- Future Farming Investment Scheme, including enhanced support for new entrants. In the past new entrants could receive an enhanced rate of up to 80% of eligible costs under relevant capital support.
- Farm Advisory Service's new-entrant support.
- Next Generation Practical Training Fund.
- Scottish Land Matching Service.

These initiatives are welcome, and NSA Scottish Region supports the principle of strong, long-term agricultural support. But there is a fundamental gap: training someone to farm does not give them land to farm.

There are two trends making this increasingly urgent.

First, farmers are retiring. Where there is no family successor, land may be sold to a neighbouring farm, absorbed into a larger business or contract-farmed by an established unit. This is understandable at an individual business level, but repeated across the country it creates a familiar pattern: the big get bigger.

Second, Scotland's land-use economy is changing rapidly. Estates are exploring income from carbon offsetting and insetting, woodland creation, rewilding and biodiversity restoration. These activities have an important role to play in tackling climate change and restoring nature. But they also have the potential to alter the economics of land ownership. If an estate can generate attractive environmental income without an agricultural tenant, what does that mean for the tenanted sector?

NSA is not arguing for sheep against trees, nor farming against nature.

Quite the opposite. In much of Scotland's uplands, the future should be about sheep and trees, grazing and biodiversity, food production and carbon. Well-managed sheep can be an important component of integrated land management, maintaining open habitats, controlling vegetation and supporting the mosaic of habitats that makes many upland landscapes distinctive.

Recent concerns about wildfire risk have also highlighted the practical role grazing can play in reducing vegetation fuel loads.

The question is therefore not whether land should deliver environmental outcomes. It is who will manage it, and whether young people will have a place within that future.

Would it be worthwhile for Scotland to consider a new Farm Partnership and Succession Scheme? Scotland leads the UK in several areas. Could this be another?

The scheme should recognise that succession does not have to mean a son or daughter taking over the family farm. An older farmer may possess land, buildings, machinery, livestock, capital and decades of irreplaceable practical knowledge. A younger person may have energy, skills, ambition and new ideas, but little capital.

Policy could bring those assets together. Entrepreneurship and innovation are vital, as are trust and alignment between parties: no such thing can be guaranteed from a government scheme. It can be incentivised with tax or finance for share farming or profit-share ventures and progressive transfers of management responsibility.

The young farmer could gradually build an equity stake and ultimately take control, while the retiring farmer could retain an income, reduce risk and have a purposeful exit from the business. To work, the finances must be attractive for landowners to keep tenanted farms going and for farming families to resist cashing in the asset. This is the major challenge.

This is succession policy rather than simply new-entrant policy. The objective is to preserve the farm and establish its next operator. The approach could be particularly valuable on large estates.

There are practical risks that must be recognised when asking young people to enter upland sheep farming. Predation by foxes, ravens and particularly white-tailed eagles can materially affect flock viability in some areas.

For an established farmer, such predation risks are difficult enough. For a young person taking their first step into a commercial sheep enterprise, they can be decisive.

When a farmer retires, the answer should not automatically be a sale to the neighbour. When an estate invests in carbon or nature, the answer should not automatically be fewer people on the land. And when there is no family successor, the skills of a lifetime should not disappear with the farmer.

If a farm cannot be passed to a son or daughter, what incentives could motivate the owner to look for a capable and aligned younger person? Is it possible to consider a new entrant scheme at the same time a community consultation would be triggered?

For NSA, that is not simply a question of agricultural succession. It is a question of whether Scotland wants its uplands to remain productive, populated and actively managed – with sheep, trees and biodiversity working together rather than being presented as competing futures. To solve the young entrant issue, the industry must solve the "farmers don't retire" issue for those that wish to start doing less.



Vets Corner, NSA Scottish Region

Ed Hill – Thrums Vet Group

Unsurprisingly, in the past couple of months one subject has dominated most conversations; bluetongue. Here in Angus and Perthshire fortunately (at the time of writing) the virus is still some way away, but its spread up the country has certainly been concerning and we have spent many hours on the phone to our clients to discuss their individual risks and concerns.



While I appreciate access to vaccine has been frustrating for some, I must say from my perspective seeing our wholesalers and vets in action to source and supply vaccine to those who need it most has been awesome. They have put in a real body of work behind the scenes. Decisions to vaccinate or not have been very nuanced in this part of the country this summer, but my feeling is that decision making will be far easier going into next spring. We know there is now a considerable amount of virus in the country and it seems quite probable that it will make its way here sooner rather than later, so for me, vaccinating in advance of next summer makes total sense.

Away from Bluetongue, the routine pre-breeding work continues at pace. We've done a stack of vasectomies; teaser tups are an excellent but often under-used way of tightening the lambing period. It just takes a little forward planning to make sure you don't castrate everything at lambing time, and that you leave a few willing candidates with their equipment! Fertility testing of tups has also started with broadly good results so far, but as ever it's always rewarding to find the one that's going to let you down before he actually has a chance to. Fertility

testing in areas that have had bluetongue will be especially important as reports suggest it can cause significant infertility in tups.

The dry summer has, in general terms, suppressed pasture worm development thus far, but that can change very quickly when moisture arrives, and worm egg counting should continue well into the autumn. In addition to this slightly changing pattern, we will start to see emergence of less common parasites in these parts. We have diagnosed a few cases of *Haemonchus* here this year, which is unusual for us. I used to think *Haemonchus* just wasn't here but have now come to believe it is one of those parasites that probably is far more widespread than we realise. It's just when favourable conditions come together that they emerge as a problem. Vigilance and monitoring are key with changing weather patterns.



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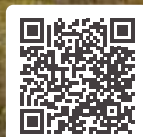
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