

Following the flock

We visit Angus, Herefordshire and Cumbria to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Rich Rossiter

Incoming NSA South West Region Chair, Devon



I farm along the South Devon coast with 600 Poll Dorsets, 200 Exlanas and 200 Suffolk/Aberblacks with 250 acres (100ha) of arable, contracting another 450 acres (180ha).

We began lambing this year with the Suffolk/Aberblacks and remaining Poll Dorsets, lambing over a three-week period, all inside, turning ewes and lambs out when the weather permitted. We were fortunate enough to only have a few cases of Schmallenberg.

In February we DNA tested as part of the Breed for CH4nge project with the Exlanas and Poll Dorsets. The individual methane output of 228 ewe lambs was measured and we will use the DNA results for parentage, genotype and other different gene markers that will become available.

We are currently in the thick of our second lambing period with 330 ewes to lamb over three weeks. Things have been going smoothly with little help required, although the weather still remains a challenge. We've struggled to turn stock out this lambing time and can see growth rates of January-born lambs have suffered too.

I'm hoping some clearer days are just around the corner, ready for the rams to go back in for the Poll Dorsets at the end of April.



Eddie Eastham

Outgoing NSA Policy & Technical Committee Chair, Cumbria



It is said we British are obsessed with the weather. Given the UK's variable climate, this is perhaps excusable.

Our recent winter certainly deserves comment and has taken its toll on both animals and their keepers. Moving sheep off stubble turnips through wet lanes and gateways has made the follow-up exercise of belly clipping an even less than usually pleasurable activity.

Fortunately the current high value of these sheep makes the effort worthwhile. Hopefully this sound trade will continue as we sell sheep on a weekly basis throughout the spring.

As time moves on and the weather improves, thoughts turn to pasture management and summer grazing arrangements. With us, everything revolves around getting the most from grass, with minimal inputs in the form of artificial fertilisers and bought-in concentrates. To continue a practical paddock grazing system, electric fences need to be checked or re-erected and water troughs cleaned and possibly moved.

Our application to the Sustainable Farming Incentive has been accepted, with less productive areas in a low nutrient inputs agreement. Other pastures are in the herbal leys tier. Some fields are already meeting this specification, while others will require re-seeding in the coming months.

We have also added hedgerow management to the SFI agreement, helping to balance ever-diminishing income from the Basic Payment Scheme.

Ed Brant

NSA Central Region committee member

Like many of you, I'm right in the thick of lambing.

All our flock of Lleyen and Hampshire ewes are lambed outside but this year we are trialling lambing ewes in smaller groups. We have installed water troughs to smaller paddocks to allow us to divide the usual large lambing fields and try to keep groups below 40 females.

The ewes were overwintered on fodder beet and looked really well heading into lambing. Having deferred grazing over winter we are now in the fortunate position of having plenty of grass to move ahead with. We were pleased with our scanning rates this year, with the Lleyens scanning at 190% and the Hampshires at 160%. Ewe lambs scanned lower but were only with the ram for a month, so perhaps to be expected.

The good lamb price has meant some of those not in lamb have now been sold finished. It seems a shame to not give them a second chance but the exceptional trade has forced our decision.

We have recently been spring drilling into stubble turnips and fodder beet. The ground has been a bit more compacted than we would like but soil health seems to be improving through this practice.

We will be hosting an NSA Central Region Farm walk in June and hope many of you will be able to join us here to view the enterprise.

