

Following the flock

We visit County Fermanagh, Herefordshire and Denbighshire to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Alistair Armstrong

NSA Northern Ireland Chair,
County Fermanagh



A difficult and wet 2023 continued into 2024 with ground conditions not improving until late April to get out with slurry and fertiliser.

Alongside lower than average temperatures our grass growth was severely hampered. We are now well into summer yet the woolly hat and waterproofs are still close to hand.

But the ewes and lambs have dealt with the wind and rain, performed well off grass and we weaned the lambs once the majority reached 14 weeks. Spring prices for finished lambs and cull ewes helped to encourage optimism within the sheep sector.

Sadly, prices in Northern Ireland dropped back severely to a similar level to 2023 when the bulk of our lambs were ready. As a primary hill producer we will not be reimbursed for the difficult and stressful 12 months we've just endured.

Summer show season is well underway and we plan to do a few of these to help support local shows and promote the breed. This year we hosted a flock open day in July to show off the different types of North Country Cheviot and their crosses.



Alistair is supporting local shows to promote his breed.



Richard is concerned about the damp weather affecting his business.

Richard Vines

NSA Marches Region Chair, Herefordshire



On reflection, lambing this year was surprisingly painless.

We lamb from mid-March and were fortunate to not experience much in the way of Schmallenberg. Some of the shepherds in the west of the county lambing earlier were less fortunate, so the debate as to how to mitigate the problem in future years begins.

Unusually we did not have any vet involvement during lambing, a great step forward but I think more luck than planning. Trying to replicate a similar outcome in the next year is rarely achieved. Every year there seems to be a different issue arising however conscientious one seems to be.

Early shearing of the rams and replacement ewes is done, but hopefully by the time you read this we'll have had a weather window to shear the ewes. Fly prevention across the flock was completed by the end of May and the colder damp weather means fly strike is not an issue.

We have made some great early haylage and some hay, but things will be challenging ahead with limited dry periods predicted. The variability of forecasting makes planning quite stressful and the continued downpours throughout summer remind me of the abysmal run of weather in 2023.

We all wish for a dry warm summer, but it seems the change in the world's seasonal weather is either wet, or like the east of Europe and America, scorching. Not sure which I prefer, as both have an impact on farming lives. Is it too much to hope for a few weeks of settled weather in the coming weeks?

Caryl Hughes

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair, Llangollen, Denbighshire



We were a bit later than we would have liked in getting everything in post-lambing to mark and drench, but were pretty pleased with how lambs had grown.

As we were late getting to them we were advised to go in with a clear wormer, followed by a multi-vitamin drench. We earmark all our Welsh ewe lambs with our farm mark and put a small notch on all other female lambs for management purposes, making it easier to sort males from females.

One problem that seems to have been an issue since this year is lameness, even in hill ewes, which I cannot recall ever being lame in the past. After a discussion with our vets we've been treating the lame and isolating the treated ones. Anything that doesn't mend after treatment and requires a second treatment will be culled once she is mended.

All the Mule ewes and their Texel lambs have been run through a footbath twice a week since June and we are getting their lambs off to market with good trade received. The Welsh ewes with their lambs and older Welsh ewes with their Mule lambs have been through the footbath when we've got them near the handling pens and during shearing.

With the yearlings gathered from the mountains and sheared, the Texel lambs weaned and the Welsh ewe lambs and their mothers back up on the mountain, the cycle will soon start again.



Caryl's ewe lambs and their mothers are back on the mountain.