

Following the flock

We visit County Fermanagh, Gloucestershire and Powys to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Kate Hovers

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair, Powys



We're now in the slightly quieter period of the sheep calendar, as rams out with the ewes and we leave them as undisturbed as possible.

The ewes all had a trace element bolus and vaccine for footrot prevention six weeks before tupping but no need for worming as a worm count showed minimal eggs. I sent blood samples from three lambs for fluke antibodies last week and they were still negative.

We live on a high fluke risk farm but, like last year, the season will be late and our ewes do not need treating yet. The lambs have been grazing the same fields as the ewes in rotation so I'm confident they will have been exposed to the same risk and act as good markers for when liver fluke is becoming a hazard.

Our two new tups are looking smart and both have been active with their respective groups.

We breed our own females but I broke my rule of not buying in and bid enthusiastically for a ewe being sold with all proceeds going to the Macmillan charity. Many others at the sale also gave donations raising a substantial sum and proving again how generous the farming community is.



Kate broke her own rules buying a ewe lamb sold for charity.

Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chair, Gloucestershire



The last time I wrote, I spoke about the start of our transition from North Country Mules in a high input/high output system to a lower output grazing system with wool shedding sheep.

I also questioned whether it would be my last year lambing Mules. Well, we have been very pleased with the performance and traits of the wool shedders. There is so much more to them than simply shedding wool. The Mules did what they always do and delivered well. It was nice to see both systems working on farm at the same time but also slightly challenging keeping them apart for biosecurity.

Once weaning was out of the way it was satisfying to look at our homebred Exlana ewe lambs – our future sheep flock. We've kept all the ewe lambs back for now and we've also purchased more to up numbers this year. Hopefully we can then become a closed flock from next year.

We've been lucky with grass growth all summer and autumn which has helped both flocks. We left the Exlana male lambs entire and they haven't been a problem – with half of them finished so far. They've started to bother each other now but hopefully that won't affect their growth rates.

Mule lambs have all gone with 60% sold finished mostly off grass and the rest sold as strong stores.

What about the Mules for next year? We still have 165 mules and the youngest would be 2018 born. They are all tugged and will lamb late February/early March. While I am still very fond of the Mule it will definitely be the last year for them. The Exlana rams went in early November, so lambing starts at the beginning of April. I will sign out by wishing you a kind winter and an early spring.



Kevin's tups are in, ready for 2024 lambing.

Alastair Armstrong

NSA Northern Ireland Chair, Co. Fermanagh

It's been a busy autumn with breeding sales taking up a lot of my time.

Most of our sales are direct off farm with stock continuing to join flocks throughout the UK and Ireland. There was also a consignment of six North Country Cheviot rams and 20 North Country Cheviot females exported to Germany.

Commercial trade has been difficult with many still recovering from extremely high input costs in 2022. Our Scotch Halfbred ewe lambs met a steady demand, down on 2022 but still averaged £133. In the North Country Cheviot NI Club sale we picked up first with an exceptional ewe lamb and she also went on to be reserve champion at the sale selling for 1,050gns with our rams topping at 1,700gns. We managed to pick up a stylish new stock ram for 2024 at the Lockerbie tup sale, Dumfries and Galloway, in September – but due to struggles with importing sheep to Northern Ireland from Great Britain, this new purchase will not be added to the flock until May when he has carried out his six month isolation requirement.

With difficulties getting in new blood to the flock we have decided to open our artificial insemination flasks and use frozen semen from rams back in the mid 1990s. We are hoping these proven sires will add a bit of something new but old to our flocks.



Alastair has enjoyed a successful selling season.

