

Following the flock

We visit Gloucestershire and Hampshire to catch up with NSA officeholders

Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chair, Gloucestershire



Floods, mudslides and parasites – sounds a bit like a Quentin Tarantino movie but it is the harsh reality of autumn and winter here at Church Farm.

I won't dwell on the weather and all the challenges it throws at us as we are all living that dream. But I have found parasites particularly challenging in the younger sheep with high worm egg counts this autumn. It seemed at times the lambs were eating as many mouthfuls of worm larvae as they were grass.

I had to stay focused to keep on top of them and my new FEC test kit was put straight into action. Another great piece of kit launched this autumn was the lateral flow test kit for liver fluke and I was fortunate enough to try one out. It was a quick



Kevin has been utilising a new FEC test kit.



Kevin is hoping for an easy outdoor lambing.

learning curve and this will be a diagnostic game changer for farmers.

Away from the farm I was honoured to be asked by Moredun to be a UK ambassador for SPARC – Sustainable Parasite Control in Grazing Ruminants – a European initiative. Very similar to the UK version SCOPS – Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep – but with the added complication of trying to embrace the whole of Europe and the differences in climates and farming systems.

Back on the farm one of the challenges I find myself grappling with is learning the best way to finish my entire ram lambs on marginal permanent pasture. It doesn't seem to help they spend most of the day loving and fighting each other and I am afraid, with the lack of forage crops and the quality of grass diminishing, I had to admit defeat and trickle a little bit of concentrate out for them to put some meat on the bones. Maybe I should have just swallowed my pride and sold them as stores? Time will tell.

Strangely and for the first time ever there are no sheep in the shed this year so it will be a straight run into outdoor lambing in April with more lessons to be learnt. But hopefully no movie titles.

Susie Parish

NSA South East Chair, Hampshire

It's been a hectic few weeks on the farm as I plan for the exciting and demanding months ahead – preparing for shearing, spinning and puppies.

One of the main tasks has been getting the sheep shed ready for our winter shearing. With the sheep producing high-quality wool, it's essential to ensure the fleeces remain uncontaminated. I have set up my shearing trailer away from the strawed up pens, so as I bring the sheep in from the field they can run straight up the race to the trailer avoiding any of the bedding that would contaminate their wool.

Shearing is one of the most crucial stages in wool production, so attention to detail now will pay off later.

Meanwhile, I've also been busy processing wool at the spinning mill. The opening, carding and pin drafting of the washed wool gets it ready for the farm owner Emma to work her magic. She'll be spinning and dyeing the wool for the



Susie processes her own wool, making her own products on-farm.



Out-of-season shearing is employed to maximise fleece value.

2025 wool shows, where it will be sold to knitters to become a variety of beautiful, hand-crafted products. Seeing the transformation from fleece to finished item is always rewarding.

On a more personal note, my border collie, Wyn, is due to have her first litter of puppies. Anticipation is high, and to make sure she's comfortable and the puppies will be safe, I've built a sturdy whelping box out of pallets. It's been a fun project and a great way to repurpose materials. I'm looking forward to meeting my next generation of working dogs - they're sure to bring even more life to the farm!

There's never a dull moment here and as each task gets ticked off the list, I'm reminded how rewarding farm life truly is.