

SHEEPFARMER

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2025
VOL. 45 NO. 1 ISSN 0141-2434

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

DISEASE OUTBREAKS
WHAT'S THE CURRENT SITUATION?

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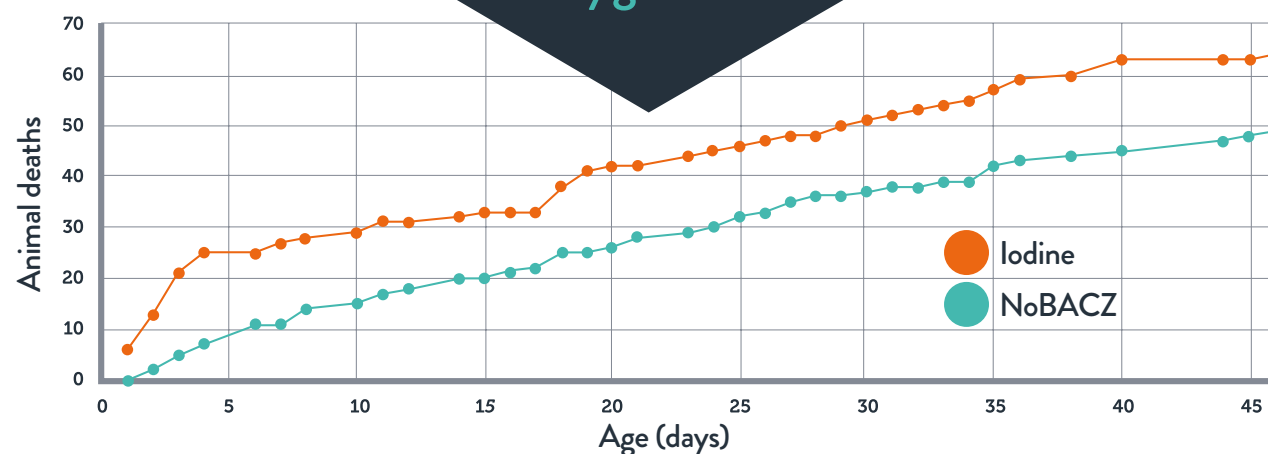
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1. Lovatt, F. (2024). A randomised controlled trial to compare the use of a novel product (NoBACZ Navel) with strong iodine to protect navel and ear tag sites of neonatal lambs. Sheep Veterinary Society Autumn Conference. September 23 - 25, Linden Hall Hotel, Northumberland, England.



Cambridge Veterinary School,
Madingley Road, Cambridge,
CB3 0ES, UK

Go where the grass is growing greener

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



The Oxford conferences are always a good way to launch the industry into action after the winter festivities, providing inspiration and unrivalled networking opportunities.

Organisers had their work cut out to lift the mood after a year of uncertainty, political change, economic pressure, climate and weather events, and anger and frustration in many quarters.

It's worth remembering 2024 saw record sheep prices. Good sheep prices always put a smile on our faces, but for many the benefit has been wiped out by constantly increasing costs and inflation. For farm businesses heavily dependent on the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and agrienvironment income, 2025 will present serious economic challenges.

During his appearance at the Oxford Farming Conference, Secretary of State Steve Reed gave little apart from the aspiration that future measures will give farm businesses new opportunity and the chance to be financially more resilient. Hidden in his words you could infer a warning that farm businesses need to be economically viable because subsidy and business support can't be relied on.

Yes, the public should pay for environmental goods – and we heard many times during the conference that farming can and needs to do more for the climate, water quality and nature – but businesses either stack up or they don't.

Survival

This year is going to be tough for many sheep farms, even with sheep prices staying high. Economic survival is a priority and the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee agenda in December focused on this subject with the Farm Business Survey (FBS) and AHDB economics team joining, along with Emily Norton, Nuffield scholar and someone with a growing reputation for honesty, clarity and the willingness to challenge from a supportive perspective.

Additional economic guidance and confidence for members to survive in these tough times can be found on pages 10 and 11.

What gives me hope is the evidence it can be done, with both FBS and AHDB data showing the top 25% economic performing farms are making money. There is no reason why only 25% of our farms can be that good. I speak to enough individual farmers to know this is the case.

But I share Ms Norton's stance – we have to be honest with ourselves and the starting point is for farm businesses to get better at business planning and gathering data so they know where to focus to hit the sweet spot of investing enough and in the right places to optimise output. Gone are the days when producing more at any cost is viable and dispersing are the days when BPS gives the luxury of a cushion.

Fixed costs

The best performing farms are keeping fixed costs under control. Sometimes this requires structural change but fixed costs of labour, rent, borrowings and machinery need to be less fixed than they often are. The best performers are spending more on variable costs investing in inputs to optimise ewe body condition and reduce losses alongside ensuring good quality colostrum, good grazing management, avoidance of disease and minimising parasite problems.

This requires investment in good genetics whatever your chosen breed, good handling kit, basic recording, vaccine use when available, working with your vet and advisers, and good grass and grazing management. The best performers aren't maximising lambs born, they are optimising lambs sold, reducing the losses and investing in things that yield a return.

This is all under our control. They aren't things governments control and they will help push your business to the top 25% level, helping survive tough times ahead.

There are things we can't predict – bluetongue virus, Schmallenberg and extreme weather events are all unwelcome visitors – but that can't be an excuse for not doing everything we can to take control of the things we know will result in our flocks looking after us every bit as much as we look after them.



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FEBRUARY / MARCH 2025

SHEEPFARMER 01

NSA stalwart recognised with award

NSA is pleased to name David Pittendreigh as the 2024 recipient of the NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for an unsung hero withing the organisation.

The award is specially selected from the many volunteers and officeholders who are at the heart of the work of NSA. David, who farms near Llandysul, Ceredigion, has made a lifetime contribution to the sheep industry from his early days in Scotland and nearly 50 years in Wales.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Development Officer Helen Roberts says: "I am delighted David has won this award. Since knowing David, he has always been willing to help in any way he can with the running of the region and NSA Welsh Sheep. His knowledge of the industry is second to none and there is no one more deserving of this accolade."

His views are well respected, demonstrated by being honored to judge at many shows, from the Royal Cornwall to the Orkneys, including the Royal Welsh and Royal Highland. He has exhibited widely and has been selling at the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale on a regular basis. David is also a past NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair and continues to work tirelessly for NSA. His dedication, interest and mentoring show no signs of waning.



This year's winner of the Bob Payne Memorial Award, David Pittendreigh.

Nugent giveaway winner announced

Hill farmer Seamus McDonnell from County Antrim has made a fantastic start to 2025 having been drawn as the lucky winner of the 2024 NSA prize giveaway.

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chair Alistair Armstrong presented the prize – a Nugent L3618H 12ft livestock trailer kindly provided by Nugent Engineering – to Seamus and wife Bernie in January. Seamus says: "The news we had won came as a complete surprise. It's a great start to the new year and it will certainly make life on the farm much easier."

Seamus farms a mixed enterprise of Texel Mule and Suffolk cross ewes along with suckler cattle on the Causeway coast and Glens area.

Seamus adds: "My current trailer has seen better days. This new trailer has an advanced decking system which will be a great benefit to me since I work alone a lot. It will be much safer and more reliable for transporting livestock. I'm very much looking forward to getting it home."



Seamus McDonnell was the lucky winner of last year's prize draw.

Contribute to 2025 sheep worrying survey

As part of its ongoing work to highlight the serious and distressing issue of sheep worrying by dogs, NSA is asking members to contribute to its latest survey.

The survey launched in December will remain open until Friday 21st February. Responses will help gain an up to date insight on the continued severity and impact sheep worrying by dogs is having on the UK sheep industry.

Members are also reminded they can request free NSA signage designed to alert dog walkers of the need to keep their pets under control to display around their farms. To request signs please contact enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk or call NSA Head Office.



New NSA giveaway

NSA is excited to announce the launch of its latest prize giveaway. This year NSA has partnered with Rurtec to offer the nation's sheep farmers the opportunity to win a fantastic prize of a Lanstron Astron cord free shearing handpiece, worth more than £450, every month.

The prize draw is open to any UK sheep farmer over the age of 16. Both NSA members and non-members can enter, but entries are limited to one per person/email address. [Find out more about this year's prize draw on page 11.](#)

Need help at lambing?

A reminder to members that the NSA Lambing List is available to place free advertisements for lambing help. The list is used by students and others seeking voluntary lambing placements.

For more information visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or call NSA Head Office.



NSA welcomes new team members

NSA is excited to have kicked off 2025 by welcoming three new staff members to its team. Positions recently filled are a new Policy Manager and new Digital Communications Officer, plus a brand-new role of Technical Communications Officer.

Michael Priestley will be joining NSA as Policy Manager in March. Michael will be a familiar name and face to many, having worked as Livestock Reporter at the Farmers Weekly for many years.

Lydia Badham has already joined as Digital Communications Officer, while this team is also now supported further by Anna Wilson as Technical Communications Officer.

We look forward to members meeting the new staff in the coming weeks and months. More about Michael, Lydia and Anna can be found on the NSA website 'contact us' page.

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Concerns over dip disposal options

The limited number of disposal options for used dipwash continues to be an issue for mobile dip contractors.

A cross-industry stakeholder group, including NSA, has written to the Water UK Environment Committee asking for collaboration and an industry review of whether used dipwash can be treated and disposed of as part of the sewage treatment process.

Water UK recently recommended samples of waste dip were tested for classification. The results showed used dipwash is classed as non-hazardous for disposal purposes. The group hopes by presenting the test results, supported by Water UK, it will increase the number of waste treatment plants able to dispose of used dipwash in a cost-effective way.

Responsible disposal is essential and members should know how and where the used dipwash from their farm will be disposed of if using a contractor.

In Wales, Natural Resources Wales has announced it will no longer be issuing new permits to farmers to dispose of used dipwash on their land, as part of efforts to safeguard Welsh rivers. Farms with active permits can continue to dispose to land for the time being but eventually all dipwash will need to be removed via a registered waste carrier and disposed of at a suitable waste facility. There is currently nowhere in Wales accepting used dipwash.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, and Lesley Stubbings of the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep group, met with Lord Trees, All Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, in January on this topic. And Mr Stocker is writing to the Environment Agency and Defra highlighting concerns.



Legalisation of skin-on sheep

NSA continues to push to re-open discussions with Government ministers and Defra regarding the legalisation of skin-on sheep meat (smokies).

NSA wrote to Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner in November and has since forwarded the same letter to the Prime Minister following his December request to businesses for suggestions on how to boost economic growth.

Secretary of State Steve Reed has also been contacted following his speech at the Oxford Farming Conference supporting UK food production.

NSA supports legalisation of skin-on sheep meat as it would cut the number of illegal imports and also stop the currently illegal practice of producing meat this way in the UK. It would cater to a large market of consumers who currently have no choice but to eat entirely unregulated meat, of dubious origin and welfare standards. A response is awaited at the time of writing.



The much-awaited independent Red Tractor review is now available.

Farm assurance review

The first UK-wide review of farm assurance has called for a fundamental reset of the system to rebuild confidence among farmers.

NSA wrote to Red Tractor back in 2024 expressing concerns, calling for an internal review of Red Tractor, which played a huge part in instigating the review in the first instance.

The review, established by the UK farming unions and AHDB, was conducted independently by four commissioners. It concluded farm assurance is critical to the industry's future, is delivering necessary assurances on quality to consumers, but must make some fundamental changes to address growing frustration in the farming community in how it is delivered.

The nine-month review collected evidence from every link in the UK food supply chain. The dissatisfaction expressed by farmers was not uniform across all sectors nor across all nations. The report is therefore nuanced in its approach, recognising where existing arrangements work well, but being clear where changes are essential.

[Read the full report at www.promar-international.com/farm-assurance-review.](http://www.promar-international.com/farm-assurance-review)

Oxford Farming Conference debates livestock numbers

The Oxford Farming Conference started the new year with some thought provoking and challenging discussions, and provided an unrivalled opportunity to network, ensuring NSA remains well connected within the industry.

The main debate was whether the UK should have fewer or more livestock, with Jude Capper from Harper Adams University proposing the motion for having more livestock and Henry Dumbleby, author of the Food Plan, opposing the motion. Although the vote was very tight, the motion went through by a majority of seven votes in favour of more livestock.

"It was a very nuanced debate," says Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, who attended the event. "My view is, without a doubt, we could see a careful increase in sheep numbers, but we are likely to see increases alongside livestock being more dispersed across the country rather than individual farms being intensified. I'm confident our island could sustainably take more livestock and have no doubt the global market would support an increase. But any growth should be aligned with market demand."

NSA Regions



Central

Chair: **Matt Bagley**



Manager: **Situation vacant**
Contact NSA Head Office for further information.



Cymru/Wales

Chair: **Caryl Hughes**



Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**
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helen@nationalsheep.org.uk



Eastern

Chair: **Robert Spink**



Manager: **Nerys Wright**
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eastern@nationalsheep.org.uk



Marches

Chair: **Anthony Warmington**



Manager: **Katie James**
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Northern

Chair: **Ted Ogden**



Manager: **Chris Adamson**
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Northern Ireland

Chair: **Alistair Armstrong**



Coordinator: **Ellen Moorehead**
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Scotland

Chair: **Peter Myles**



Coordinator: **Grace Reid**
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South East

Chair: **Susie Parish**



Manager: **Sarah Blake**
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South West

Chair: **Rich Rossiter**



Manager: **Ian May**
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NSA Ram Sales



Wales & Border: **Jane Smith**
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jane@nsaramsales.co.uk



South West: **Sue Martyn**
01409 271385 / 07967 512660
sue@nationalsheep.org.uk



For NSA Eastern Region (Rugby/Melton) and NSA South East Region (Thame) ram sales enquiries, please contact NSA Head Office using the details on page 1.

NSA regional reports

NSA Eastern Region

By Nerys Wright, Manager

The region recently held its Annual Members' Meeting, the first with myself and Chair Robert Spink in post.

It was nice to see many there. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker came along to speak about the work of NSA but in a slightly different format to usual – an open Q&A where members could ask questions – and it led to a very interest range of topics discussed.

The main speakers were Katie Evans, NSA Eastern Region Committee member, and Ed Brant, from NSA Central Region. Both were selected by NSA to represent the UK at the Next Generation Global Sheep Forum in Australia last year. They shared their experiences of their farm visits and LambEx conference.

This year is the biennial young shepherds competition for NSA Eastern Region – look out for a date and venue due to be announced soon. We hope to see many of you there.



The Global Next Generation Forum was a meeting highlight.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager



The region has held its Annual Members' Meeting and thanks must go to the committee members for their hard work in providing a large number of events for members this past year.

In preparing her report for the meeting, NSA South East Region Chair Susie Parish reflected on the programme of events held in 2024 and looked ahead to an equally busy and productive 2025. Susie commented on the success of the Next Generation Shepherd Competition, the region's two Field Days and the enjoyable summer farm walk.

Planning is now underway for the NSA South East Region Sheep Health, Welfare & Production (SHWAP) Conference in October. Make sure you don't miss it.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

The regional committee was pleased to host two events in early February.

The first was a live butchery demonstration, including an explanation of how carcasses are balanced across different markets within the UK and abroad.

The second event – the NSA Northern Region Annual Members' Meeting – included official business, an update from NSA Communications Manager Katie James and a presentation by Richard Rankin, Chief Executive at H&H. Richard gave an overview of the industry's current trajectory, the importance of succession planning and the potential impact of changes to inheritance tax.

The meeting included a change of regional Trustee. Alan Alderson has stepped down – thanks to Alan for his valuable time in office. We now welcome James Raine as the new NSA Northern Region Trustee.



Plans are continuing well for NSA North Sheep.

NSA Central Region

NSA Central Region is now seeking a new enthusiastic person to manage regional activity supported by the regional committee following Lizzy Wells stepping down from this position. To find out more about this honorarium position please contact enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

NSA South West Region kicked off the year with an insightful meeting with Defra at Fingle Glen near Exeter.

Many thanks to all who made it along on the night. As government policy seems to be evolving at an ever-increasing pace it's important to keep abreast of things while inputting our thoughts along the way.

Thoughts now turn to the Annual Regional Members' Meeting at the Stockman's Restaurant, Exeter Market, 7.30pm on Tuesday 18th February. This year we will be joined by Will Jackson, AHDB Market Development & Communications Director, who will be looking at the opportunities available to the lamb industry beyond our borders and AHDB's role in helping access them. In addition, Janet Roden from Innovis will present on the latest findings from the Breed for CH4nge project looking at how sheep breeding and genetics can be used to reduce methane emissions. Finally, Nicola Noble, NSA Project Manager, will be joining to talk about the work NSA is undertaking.

The meeting will be followed by a buffet supper. Members and non-members welcome. I look forward to seeing you there.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

The region was delighted to hear one of its committee stalwarts, David Pittendreich, has won the prestigious NSA Bob Payne Memorial Award for Unsung Hero.

I can't think of anyone more worthy. Thanks to David for all his hard work and efforts within the committee and at events. Long may it continue. [More on page 2.](#)

David will be presented with the award at NSA Welsh Sheep on 21st May. Trade bookings are officially closed for the event but applications are still being welcomed at www.welshsheep.org.uk or by contacting me directly.

The region was also pleased to support the recent 2025 Wales YFC Agri Conference, and held its Annual Regional Members' Meeting – all officers remained the same.

A reminder for members to access the regional newsletter online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/our-work/news.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

The region enjoyed coming together at Worcester Livestock Market for its Annual Members' Meeting in January.

The meeting saw several changes in office, most notably welcoming Anthony Warmington as the new NSA Marches Region Chair. Anthony follows Richard Vines into this position, whom the regional committee thank for the past three years of service.

Following formal business attendees received an update from Defra representatives on the latest announcements concerning farm support. NSA Chair Peter Delbridge also gave an interesting account of his time as NSA Chair so far, as well as an insight into his involvement with the Breed for CH4nge project.

While our attention focuses on the lambing season, plans will soon begin for the regional NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition this summer. A venue has been secured near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. Further details will be shared in the next edition of *Sheep Farmer*.



Anthony Warmington (left) and Pete Delbridge, regional and national chairs.



The region is excited about NSA Sheep Northern Ireland.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Ellen Moorehead, Coordinator

There have been several exciting developments in the region since my last report in December.

We had an onsite visit to the McFarlane family farm, the venue for NSA Sheep Northern Ireland this year. Located on the outskirts of Dungiven, the farm offers a stunning setting for the event and will be sure to make it a fantastic day out for the whole family family on Tuesday 1st July 2025.

As this magazine arrives with members the Annual Regional Members' Meeting will have just taken place. We were thrilled to welcome a range of expert guest speakers, ensuring a valuable and informative experience for all attendees.

In addition to these events, NSA Northern Ireland Region is partnering with Parklands Veterinary Practice and MSD Animal Health to deliver a series of workshops focusing on sheep diseases such as maedi visna and Schmallenberg. Exact venues and dates will be confirmed soon and shared via NSA communications.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

NSA Scottish Region was pleased to engage with attendees at the meeting in January to discuss matters arising from lynx reintroduction and future formal consultation responses on the subject.

Taking place in St Boswell, Scottish Borders, attendees were forthcoming with their views and provided dynamic and articulated points, which will be fully utilised by NSA when representing the sheep industry.

The region looks forward to welcoming members and the wider sheep industry to its Annual Members' Meeting due to take place on Wednesday 19th February, 10.30am at the Roslin Institute, Easter Bush Campus, EH25 9RG, in conjunction with a tour of SRUC facilities. Presentations will also be made on the future of sustainable sheep breeding and farming in Scotland.

Plans are already well underway for attendance at the Royal Highland Show and the organising committee have been finalising the penultimate decisions for NSA Highland Sheep 2025.

NSA Welsh Sheep

NSA Welsh Sheep 2025 will surely be one of the highlights of the sheep farming calendar, an essential technical event combining a great day out with the opportunity to learn, engage and refresh.

The venue at Tregoyd Farm, near Hay on Wye, is set in idyllic countryside in the Welsh Borders. It's the perfect backdrop for topping up on technical knowledge and skills, to update on the political landscape and simply to enjoy sheep.

The host family will showcase their High Country Romneys. The enterprise is a family partnership comprising Penny Chantler and her sons Will and Sam Sawday.

Activities

There will be many other breeds on display at the various sheep breed society stands. Technical and policy information will be available and there will be the opportunity to address the latest trends and politics at seminars, marketing sessions and trade stands. Seminars will focus on sustainability, sheep genetics and regenerative farming with demonstrations including new product launches.

Entertainment for visitors on the day will include the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition, demonstrations, sheepdog trials and a display of Welsh sheepdogs. Tractor rides to the higher ground, rising to 1,200ft above sea level, will also feature. *Meet the host farmers on pages 24-25.*



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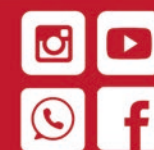
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NSA North Sheep 2025

NSA Northern Region is preparing for the North of England's most anticipated biennial sheep industry event – NSA North Sheep 2025.

This year's event will be set against the picturesque backdrop of Greystoke Castle Farm in Cumbria. Hosted by the Peile family, the 2,300acre (930ha) farm will offer an insight into innovative, sustainable farming and stunning views.

NSA North Sheep will be a tremendous showcase of the sector with hundreds of trade stands, breed societies and individual breeders.

Line-up

Highlights will include guided farm tours of the diverse operation, including a hill sheep flock and self-replenishing lowland flock, as well as the beef and dairy herd. Demonstrations, seminars, a sheepdog trial and a brand-new speed shear competition will ensure the 2025 event is not to be missed.

"This year's venue, nestled between the Lake District National Park and the Eden Valley, is set to be a great event," said Ted Ogden, NSA Northern Region Chair. "The Peile family's commitment to sustainable food production and environmental care ensures an enriching experience for all."

"Whether you're a farmer, industry professional or sheep enthusiast, NSA North Sheep is an unmissable opportunity to connect, learn and embrace farming."

NSA Welsh Sheep and NSA North Sheep will be the first of five regional sheep events in summer 2025. More in future editions and at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.



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The importance of carrying views and concerns forward using NSA regions

By Katie James, NSA

Having learnt more about several NSA regions in *Sheep Farmer* magazine during 2024, the introductions to some familiar faces central to its regional network continue as we start another year.

As one of the largest NSA regions in England, taking in the counties of Cumbria, County Durham, Humberside, Lancashire, Northumberland and North and West Yorkshire, NSA Northern Region is tasked with representing the views of sheep farmers from a very wide range of sheep enterprises.

Be your voice

To do this the region aims to travel across the North of England hosting meetings, farm walks and other events, often alongside industry partners and commercial supporters. Discussions from meetings, such as the future of upland sheep farming and proposed wild animal reintroductions, are taken forward by regional committee representatives and the regional trustee to ensure views are shared and actioned.

A highlight of the region's biennial calendar is the popular NSA North Sheep, which will return in June 2025. The event is considered one of the leading showcases of the UK sheep sector in the country.

Ted Ogden Regional Chair

My involvement with NSA goes back more than 20 years. Working in Cumbria I came across a heartbeat of great people involved with NSA, which beckoned further involvement.

Over the years this involvement grew as I joined the regional committee, ultimately leading to officeholder positions including the role as Chair which I was proud to take on at the start of 2024.

I have worked as a livestock auctioneer across the North of England for approaching 30 years. Throughout this time, including periods working for Clitheroe Auction Mart, Penrith Farmers and Kidds, Harrison & Hetherington, and now on my home patch in North Yorkshire with CCM at Skipton Auction Mart, my appreciation for the work of NSA has grown. All these companies share the views and prioritise attendance at NSA events above many others.

As Chair of the region I aim to work hard to share the views of farmers within our region, helping to push for a positive future for members here and the wider UK, supporting the work of Phil Stocker and the NSA Head Office team.

Fact file

- Became NSA Northern Region Chair in 2024.
- Has worked as a livestock auctioneer for many years.



Ted is enjoying time as NSA Northern Region Chair.

Rebecca Wilson Committee member and NSA English Committee

I farm alongside my parents on a mixed sheep and arable farm in the Vale of York. The sheep enterprise consists of 140 Suffolk cross ewes put to a Beltex tup to lamb in January. We try to sell these lambs to catch the early spring trade through Bentham Auction Market, aiming to produce a high quality, well finished carcase fitting the demand of the liveweight system.

We also lamb 40 Scotch Halfbred ewes put to a Suffolk and for the first time this year are selling the gimmer lambs for breeding, keeping them on farm until they are shearlings.

Being involved in NSA Northern Region and representing the region on the NSA English Committee has been beneficial for my own farming business, to improve my awareness of wider issues facing the industry. I hope to be able to continue my relationship with NSA and encourage the next generation of sheep farmers.



Rebecca has gained a lot from NSA Committees.

Fact file

- Actively uses social media to increase public awareness of the public goods delivered by UK sheep farming.
- Keen to use her NSA roles to inspire the next generation of sheep farmers.

Beth Phalp Committee member

I farm on the border of the North Yorkshire moors with my parents, running a mixed farm that's primarily tenanted.

I am responsible for the farm's 500 breeding ewe flock and believe an involvement with NSA Northern Region and the NSA Next Generation programme is helping me develop the flock through the contacts, knowledge and experience I have gained.

I'd encourage any young person with an interest in sheep farming to get involved with NSA, especially the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the scheme and feel very lucky to have been part of it.



Beth was a past NSA Next Generation Ambassador.

Fact file

- NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2022.
- Embraces NSA involvement to improve her 500 ewe breeding flock.

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By Dr T.B. Barragry PhD MSc MVB MRCVS

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Public goods delivered by sheep farming are undervalued.

Is UK sheep farming financially secure after payments and Budget changes?

By Andrea Calvesbert, NSA

A £22bn 'black hole' in Britain's economy has set a challenging economic outlook for Britain, and farming is without doubt caught up in these challenges.

The £2.5bn per year farm budget in England aims to encourage the delivery of environmental goods with investment offers such as the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway and capital grants. But the decline of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) is now accelerated and our seven-year transition will be over before we can blink.

The urgency for farming enterprises to stand on their own two feet if they want to survive is paramount. We've enjoyed record sheep prices over the last two years and prospects for the future look promising, but general costs and input inflation are quickly eroding margins.

In late December 2025, the NSA Policy & Technical Committee delved deeper into sheep farm financial reports and the key practical trends leading to top performing farms. This found plenty of examples of sheep farms in both severely disadvantaged areas (SDAs) and other parts of the country making good money. They are often presented as the top 25%, but the good news is all farms could reach this level of performance.

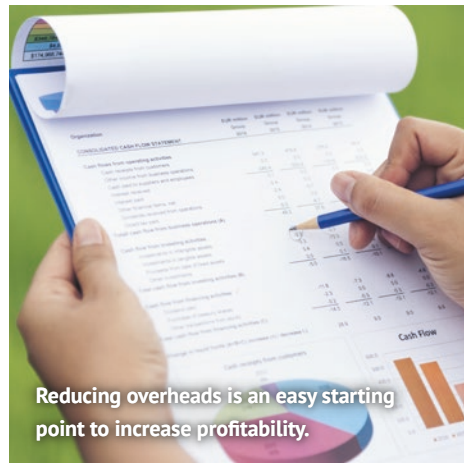
Inform policy

The Farm Business Survey is a vital piece of work carried out annually on behalf of the government by Promar. More than 2,300 farms across England and Wales take part in the survey each year, providing management accounting information on all aspects of their business. The results then help inform government policy.

In the meeting Martin Riley of Promar gave an insight into the Farm Business Survey findings as of March 2024, which included 500 sheep farms representing 36% of the overall farms taking part.

The figures show the price of lambs, both store and finished, has increased but variable costs are also increasing meaning profit margins on lowland flocks had largely stood still.

Flocks in less favoured areas – such as remote, poor-quality land, generally more reliant on support payments – had seen increased margins due to using less fertiliser and feed. But profit margins made for harsh reading – an average of £16,218 profit for sheep farms this year.



Reducing overheads is an easy starting point to increase profitability.

"The majority of sheep farms are making nothing at all if you take BPS out," says Mr Riley. "The Farm Business Survey aims to inform policy and farmers. I think these figures highlight policy does need to change especially for the less favoured area sheep farms. Without significant investment for the added value these farms provide, they are going to struggle."

Jess Corsair, AHDB senior economist, shared the modelling work done on a virtual lowland

350-acre (150ha) beef and sheep farm. "In order to make up for inflation, farm funding would have to increase by about £1bn but in real terms it has decreased since 2019," she says. "Carbon credits and net gain are also having a huge impact on land prices and pushing them up, adding to difficulties for new entrants."

On the virtual farm model, the accelerated reduction in direct payments resulted in a loss of more than £5,300 of expected income in 2025 – something felt by most farm business across the country today.

Projection

AHDB's three-year projection suggests these reductions would not be offset by the Sustainable Farming Incentive or existing Countryside Stewardship actions, and the virtual farm would see a reduction in income from around £28,000 in 2024 to around £17,000 by 2026.

While modelling suggests a bleak picture for farming, there are positive measures which can be instigated to ensure businesses remain profitable and progressive.

AHDB's modelling shows overhead costs are one of the biggest differences between sheep farms in the middle 50% of profitability and the bottom 25%, so taking a tough look at whether overhead costs of land, labour and machinery can be reduced is a great starting point. This may involve some business re-modelling but could be worthwhile in the long run. This is the same for farms in non-SDA as well as SDA.

In non-SDA flocks, the middle 50% of farms had the highest income per ewe and the net margin was only reduced due to higher costs – again something which could be reviewed. The top 25% of farms focused on the cost of production even though they saw the lower

number of lambs reared per ewe. In SDAs, good output was the key to higher profits but cost control was critical, particularly as feed and forage costs created more variation.

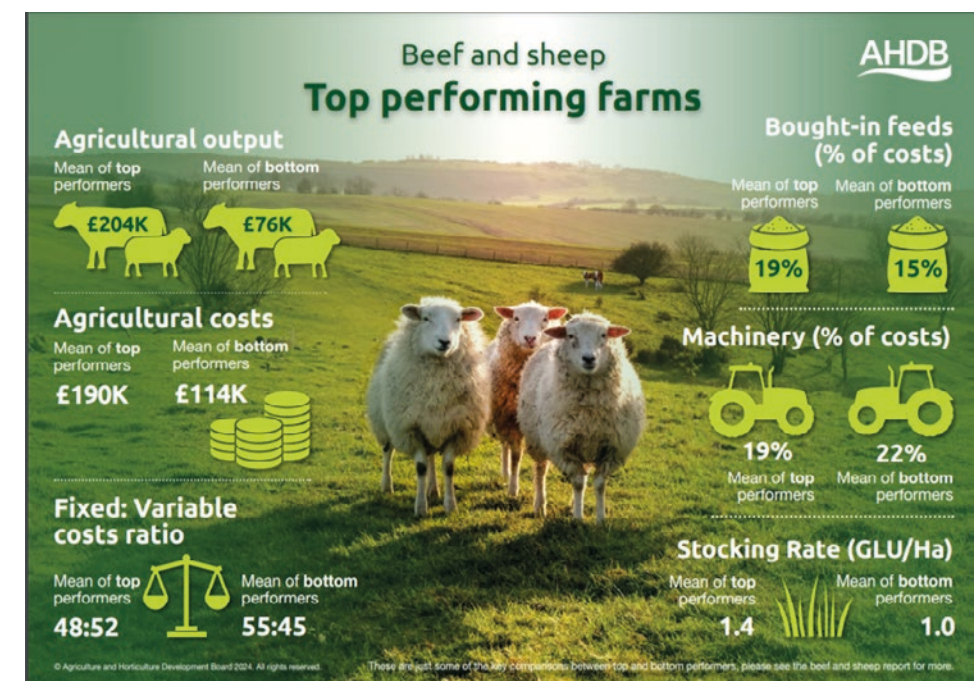
A good starting point available to those wanting to future-proof their business is AHDB's Farmbench healthcheck. It allows you to compare your farm to similar businesses and identify where you can improve efficiency and potentially increase profits.

Family farms

Family farms are incredibly resilient, flexible and have many advantages over big corporate structures, farming adviser and columnist Emily Norton told NSA.

Questioning whether other pressures, such as inheritance tax, could be the end of the family farm, her views were clear: "Absolutely not. Family farms are incredibly resilient. The family structure is the only one which can flex and change its expectations in the face of changing markets and policies. We need to explain to the government and the wider industry why the family farm structure is better."

"I object to this food security mantra. We need to think about everything – energy, eco-systems, services and how we use the land – or we will miss out. What do we genuinely mean by food



security? There needs to be better alignment of schemes and farm outputs as the things not producing environmental outcomes are not being funded and present risk."

Farming businesses in 2025 must navigate challenges ranging from financial stress and its associated pressure on mental health, climate change and unclear government direction,

to the threat of diseases, such as bluetongue, Schmallenberg and foot-and-mouth. But, through sustainable farming practices, innovative business models and support within the farming community, you can often turn these challenges into opportunities for growth and resilience.

NSA encourages members to look at the Farm Business Survey and make use of Farmbench.




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Proposed reintroductions show lack of appreciation for UK livestock farming

Species reintroductions are being suggested across the country, but the comprehension of the consequences for livestock farmers is not recognized.

With the proposed reintroduction of sea eagles into South East Wales, Devon and Cumbria and the possibility of lynx making a return to the borders of England and Scotland, along with the Scottish Highlands, sheep farmers are facing an increasing amount of pressure and the possibility of having to completely change the way they farm to keep their flocks safe.

NSA has been involved in numerous meetings with the Missing Lynx Project regarding a potential release in Kielder Forest on the Scottish/English border in Northumberland, Lynx to Scotland involved in a potential release in the Highlands, the proposed sea eagle release lead by Eagle Reintroduction Wales, the Cumbrian White-tailed Eagle Project (CWTE) and a more recent proposal to reintroduce the eagles into Exmoor and Devon.

Public opinion

While these are all separate projects, they require a joined-up response from NSA to ensure those who will be most effected are given a voice. There is concern within NSA and its membership that open events hosted particularly by the Missing Lynx Project have given a very cosy view of lynx, which have resulted in more support from the general public. Whereas the people most affected – those working the land and anyone keeping livestock – are in the minority and there is no weighting given to these views, even though they will be financially, socially and emotionally most affected.

With this in mind, NSA organised two meetings in Hexham, Northumbria, and St Boswell's, Scottish Borders, at the end of January to meet with

members and non-members to hear their views on the potential lynx reintroduction in the Kielder Forest area.

Led by myself and Grace Reid, NSA Scottish Region Coordinator, the meetings heard from NSA, RABI and Farm Strong with the useful addition of Jonny Hanson, Nuffield Scholar and specialist in human-wildlife coexistence, who spoke about the findings of his Nuffield report on the reintroduction of carnivores. His conclusions align somewhat with those of NSA in that a much more detailed impact analysis and work on the financial implications are required before any reintroductions of lynx take place in the UK.

"Lynx alone are not going to solve the nature crisis," said Dr Hanson. "At this moment there are significant gaps in knowledge and planning. Within the re-wilding movement there is a romanticising of the lynx. There is also a demonisation of the lynx from the opposite end of the scale. There is a middle ground, but bringing lynx back is complicated."

Discussions and views were exchanged in these meetings, which will help form the basis of NSA's response to the Missing Lynx Project and Lynx to Scotland, along with the sea eagle projects.

Increased stress

Apart from the obvious concern about lynx taking lambs, sheep and newborn calves – which the Missing Lynx Project says will not be an issue as lynx will have enough roe deer, which is their favoured prey – livestock owners concerns were very much centred around the stress of worrying of their flocks and potentially the total change in livestock keeping that may be required to keep animals safe.

Examples given by both Dr Hanson and the Missing Lynx Project of mitigation measures – electric fencing, overnight corrals and guard dogs or donkeys – are implemented in areas of Europe where methods of livestock management are very different.

It was felt fencing and corrals would be impractical, require capital investment and ongoing spend on additional staff, along with changing the look of the landscape. Guard dogs would require investment for feeding, training and keeping. They would also make it impossible for people to use public footpaths or the right to roam in Scotland as they would potentially

attack walkers and their pet dogs. Shepherding sheep grazing on wide open areas, such as moorland and uplands, to prevent lynx attacks would require more labour at a level impossible for most farms to consider.

The spread of lynx across the border in Kielder was another concern – two different governments with different policies. How would this work and who would be responsible if the lynx were released one side of the border and naturally crossed to the other?

There were concerns those proposing the reintroductions had no knowledge of how farming works in reality, or the benefits particularly sheep farming brings to the landscape.

Disease spread

The case of foot-and-mouth disease in Germany has also raised concerns about sea eagles and lynx being potentially lethal spreaders of costly diseases such as foot-and-mouth, bluetongue and Schmallenberg. Again, something which doesn't appear to have been considered by the groups proposing the reintroductions.

There does not yet appear to have been an in-depth cost analysis of reintroductions. Who would provide compensation, how would it be accessed, what evidence would be needed and who would provide the support system required for livestock keepers to deal with any lynx or sea eagle-related problems, especially once the project has finished? All these are questions yet to be answered to anyone's satisfaction.

Ian May, NSA South West Region Manager and sheep farmer in Devon, says: "While the way the Roy Dennis Foundation is conducting its existing sea eagle project on the Isle of Wight should be commended, I am concerned about the long-term impact once the reintroduction projects have finished and we are on our own with a naturalised population at or above the carrying capacity of the land. The experience of our fellow farmers on the west coast of Scotland needs to be better understood by all potential releases and currently doesn't instil confidence we will be supported when our flocks need protecting."



Sea eagle releases are being proposed in the UK.



Predation is a major worry for most livestock keepers.

Negative impact

Species reintroductions are an ongoing concern and although no licences have been made, they are likely to come. NSA will ensure the voice of members in England, Scotland and across the wider nation are heard and listened to.

There is a lot of support from the general public for species reintroduction often hung on the tagline of solving our wildlife crisis, but many people don't realise the

full impact of reintroductions on the farming community and the vital work farming already does in encouraging and supporting wildlife and biodiversity.

It is vital we encourage more public support for the industry by promoting farming as not only food production but also the hugely important work delivered every day to support and improve our landscapes for the general public to enjoy. NSA will continue to do this at every level and we encourage members to do the same at any opportunity.

Read Dr Hanson's research at www.jonnyhanson.com/about.

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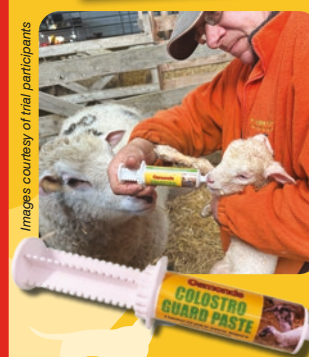


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Stay up to date with UK reporting, movement restrictions and disease risks

By Andrea Calvesbert, NSA

As the current bluetongue virus (BTV) risks are lowered, Schmallenberg virus (SBV) and now foot-and-mouth disease are creating new challenges for sheep farmers across the nation.

On Tuesday 21st January, the UK Chief Veterinary Officer announced we are now in the seasonal vector low period for bluetongue. Due to a decrease in temperature, midge activity is lower, with midges not actively feeding, meaning there is a low risk of new infections from biting midges.

As a result, some restrictions have been eased. These include removing the requirements for post-movement testing of animals out of the restricted zone (RZ), the use of insecticide on transport vehicles and the need to send animals moving outside of the RZ for slaughter to designated abattoirs.

Precautions

As a precautionary measure, the RZ currently in place in affected regions along the east and south coast of England will remain while discussions with industry continue on the next steps.

All animals moving out of the RZ will still require a pre-movement test to acquire a special licence unless going direct to slaughter or to a dedicated slaughter market.

Animals can now move out of a RZ to a breeding sale at any market but will need evidence of the pre-movement test. Sheep can now also move into Wales and Scotland from a RZ with the pre-movement test and special licence. The pre-movement blood test is part of the licence application, made on the .gov website.

NSA urges members to continue to monitor stock frequently for clinical signs and ensure all

stock and land is registered appropriately. BTV is a notifiable disease meaning any suspicion of BTV in animals in England must be reported to the Animal Plant & Health Agency (APHA).

The situation for SBV is different. Scotland, northern England and Northern Ireland have all seen increased cases of SBV in early lambing flocks this year.

SBV only affects lambs if ewes are bitten by infected midges in the first third of their pregnancy, hence why it is seen mainly in early lambing flocks. Being bitten outside this time doesn't impact the lamb and can stimulate immunity – hence the disease appears on a cyclical basis.

The UK saw a peak in 2017 and a re-emergence in around 2021. Last year cases were reported in the West Country and West Midlands in early lambing flocks where tupping and early pregnancy coincides with high midge activity.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "What we are seeing now, which was predicted, is areas that saw SBV last year are not seeing a high number of cases this year but it has spread out and is affecting other areas where there is a high level of naivety in those animals and therefore low immunity."

Vaccine

There is a UK-licensed SBV vaccine but unfortunately pharmaceutical companies have no appetite to produce it due to previous low uptake making it commercially inviable. As a result, there is no vaccine currently available. NSA stresses the importance of considering SBV control strategies through discussions with vets and advisers.

Mr Stocker adds: "It is a dilemma for those who lamb early. They need to be aware of the risk and do their own risk assessment, managing their flocks as they see fit. What we will probably see now is areas that have experienced SBV this year will see very low levels over the next three years."

NSA strongly urges any farmers who experience unusual circumstances during lambing to speak to their vet about laboratory analysis. This is a free service offered by APHA but it needs to be done through your vet.

To add to concerns, the UK's risk level for foot-and-mouth has been increased to medium following the discovery of the disease in water buffalo in Germany. A ban on imports into the UK of sheep, cattle, pigs, deer, buffalo and their meat and dairy products from anywhere in Germany remains in place.

NSA stresses vigilance to multiple infection risks across the nation.



Foot-and-mouth symptoms

- Severe lameness that develops quickly.
- Lying down more than usual.
- Unwillingness to move.
- High numbers of abortions, stillbirths and lambs dying soon after birth.
- Young lambs quiet and inactive.
- Ewes unwilling to let lambs suckle.
- Blisters on the hooves or in the mouth that are small and hard to spot.

The case was confirmed in early January in three water buffalo just outside Berlin in a small, non-commercial herd believed to be part of a re-wilding project. The animals were initially tested for bluetongue virus, but the result was negative. They were then tested for foot-and-mouth, which was positive to a strain of the disease generally found in the Middle East and South Asia. This infection has been linked to Turkey.

All animals within a 1km radius were culled including sheep, pigs and goats as a precautionary measure and extensive testing continues.

Measures

Defra has actioned precautionary measures to protect UK farmers who are urged to remain vigilant – especially as some symptoms of foot-and-mouth are similar to bluetongue. The biggest concern in Germany is the potential of wild boar and deer to be spreaders.

Members are urged to follow good biosecurity and report any suspicions to APHA in England and Wales, and contact your local field services office in Scotland.

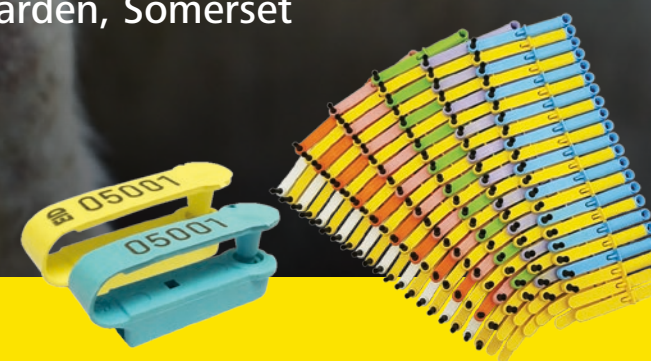
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Schmallenberg virus is becoming apparent in early lambing flocks.

Learning from other regions to prepare for proposed sea eagle release in Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



I attended a meeting instigated by the NSA South West Region in January to discuss the proposed reintroduction of sea eagles on Exmoor.

Robyn Munt, a farm business consultant on the Isle of Wight, provided some interesting information based on his experience following the sea eagles reintroduction to the island in 2019.

NSA aims to involve the Roy Dennis Foundation, which is behind the proposed Exmoor release, and the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, who is organising the proposed release in South East Wales and the Severn Estuary in its next meeting. Sea eagle releases are also being proposed in Cumbria.

Sustainability

Also in January, Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, and I attended a meeting with Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs, where we updated him on our

Sustainability Report. We hope this escalates engagement with Welsh Government.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region continues to engage in meetings to discuss the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). Recent amendments are welcomed

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is concerned about sea eagle releases.



by NSA, including emphasising the importance of collaboration between the farming community and government, recognising and valuing ecosystem services provided by agriculture, scrapping the 10% tree cover idea and reducing the minimum number of actions needed on-farm to be eligible for the SFS universal layer.

Successful implementation will depend on clear guidance, fair payment structures, and support for those transitioning to new practices. SFS has the potential to set a benchmark for sustainable farming policy in the devolved nations, provided it remains practical, inclusive and adaptive to the needs of the agricultural sector.

Quarry tips

NSA has responded to the Disused Mine and Quarry Tips (Wales) Bill Committee consultation. The overarching aim of the bill is to reduce the likelihood of landslides on disused coal and non-coal tips through the establishment of a Disused Tips Authority for Wales, which will have powers to make landowners take preventative action. The NSA response is available on request.

The Welsh Government has launched an independent review of the CPH system to make it easier to use. I urge all NSA members to share their views.

Find the CPH consultation at <https://tinyurl.com/2vhwurmt> and read more about sea eagles on pages 12-13.

Importance of vigilance emphasised as disease threats loom over Northern Ireland

By Ellen Moorehead, Regional Coordinator



NSA Northern Ireland Region has reported a recent surge in Schmallenberg virus (SBV) cases, particularly in early lambing flocks.

Farmers are urged to remain vigilant for signs of SBV, including increased abortions, stillbirths or lambs born with deformities. If SBV is suspected, contact your vet immediately.

Post mortems

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute also strongly encourages submission of carcasses of deformed or aborted lambs to its labs in Omagh, County Tyrone, or Stormont, Belfast, for post-mortem examination to help track disease prevalence and spread.

Good biosecurity practices can help reduce the

risk of SBV and other midge-borne diseases.

There has been no further update on maedi visna (MV) funding from Daera. But the region is collaborating with Parklands Vets and MSD Animal Health to deliver workshops in early February focusing on key sheep diseases including SBV, MV and bluetongue.

The events will be in several locations across NI. Further announcements and registration details will be available soon.

A reminder to all members – speak with your vet if you have any concerns or want guidance on these diseases or anything else sheep health related.

In a significant boost for the agricultural sector, the Northern Ireland Executive confirmed in late December the ring-fencing of the agriculture budget. This crucial decision ensures allocated

funds will be exclusively used to support farming and rural development within the region, providing stability and much-needed reassurance.

More on SBV and bluetongue virus on pages 14 & 28.



Biosecurity is even more critical with new diseases present.

New agricultural policy needs careful monitoring says NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



As we edge closer to the EU Common Agricultural Policy ceasing to apply in Scotland, Scottish Government continues to develop its new support scheme.

The Agricultural Reform Programme offers the opportunity to develop and operationalise new regulations, policies and delivery models, which will enable transformational change to agricultural practices and land-use. But members will be acutely aware it needs to be fit for purpose and deliver for those who are carrying out operations daily.

NSA Scottish Region and other stakeholders has been invited to engage in monitoring and evaluation framework engagement events aimed at ensuring inclusivity of the knowledge, expertise and insight of the sector. The first took place at the end of January with follow-up events in March/April.

Scottish Government has made a statutory proposal to establish a new national park in the Galloway area. A consultation seeking to gauge levels of support will draw to a close in mid-February and covers topics such as governance and views of locals and the community. NSA Scottish Region will be formulating a full response ahead of the deadline on behalf of members.

Bluetongue

Bluetongue discussions continue to be at the fore of policy in Scotland on animal welfare and disease transmission fronts, understandably due to occurrences in England. Despite entering a seasonally vector low period in late January, due to decreases in temperature and midge activity, industry are keen to establish the next steps.

Scottish stakeholders have met regularly throughout 2024 and early 2025 on the implications of the virus in the UK and continue

to debate the effectiveness of restrictions and vaccination use, which may be imposed in Scotland.

The regional committee has been keeping an eager eye on developments and has rising concerns on the impact of cross border trade alongside the cost and efficacy of vaccinations should emergency authorisation be granted in Scotland in the future.



Bluetongue restrictions in England will impact Scotland.

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Next generation of sheep farmers reap benefits thanks to NSA initiative



During the summer of 2023 NSA Next Generation was pleased to team up with the Dutch Spotted Sheep Society and Kaiapoi Romneys to deliver the NSA Next GENE-eration project for the second time.

This initiative provided young sheep breeders with access to top genetics by giving away vouchers to purchase a ram and integrate new genetics into their flock. The successful project allowed several enthusiastic young people to benefit from owning a fully performance recorded ram from which to grow their own enterprises.

With the purchased rams having been influential for a full production cycle, some of the lucky young sheep farmers involved in the scheme give an update on how it has worked for them.

Dafydd Owen Denbighshire

After being successful in the 2023 Next GENE-ration ram giveaway I had the opportunity to meet up with Rob Hodgkins of Kaiapoi Romneys to hear about his system and select a ram that would suit us. Rob had the Sheep Improvement Limited (SIL) breeding figures for the rams to hand, which helped me pick out a ram with good maternal traits to introduce to our flock.

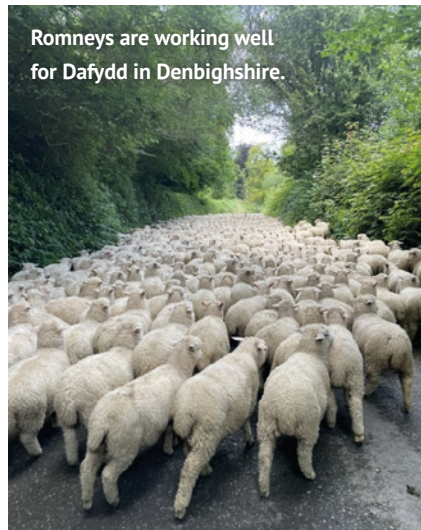
We run 2,000 Romney ewes at Coed Coch with 1,400 of them going to a Romney ram. Having started to keep the best performing ram lambs from our breeding stock five years ago, in addition to the previously bought Wairere rams, this was a great opportunity to add new blood into our flock.

We tup our ewes in four groups with a ratio of roughly 70 ewes per ram. The Kaiapoi ram was used with our group of shearling ewes as it had EBVs I thought would suit them. We don't normally raddle the rams but I did for the Kaiapoi to follow his performance. He marked his fair share of ewes and they twinned well.

At lambing the lambs had good vigour in spite of it being one of the wettest we've had in a while. Lamb survivability was good and the percentage of lambs weaned from ewes mated was up 7% from our rolling average.

This year the Kaiapoi ram was put with our mixed age ewes and we are looking forward for scanning imminently to see the result. The ewes are currently on deferred grass and bale grazing, which has held up well in the cold snap. For the year ahead we are aiming for tighter rotations to hopefully improve grass quality for lactating ewe and lambs to get better daily liveweight gain from the lambs up to weaning.

Romneys are working well for Dafydd in Denbighshire.



Richard and Jen Oglesby Northumberland

We were overwhelmed to win two out of the five Romney rams available back in 2023. It was a great opportunity for us to try something different, which we had been considering for a while.

We tried three different breeds of maternal rams on our Lleyne ewes - Romney, Lleyne and Easycare. We also purchased 400 Romney and 250 Easycare ewe lambs in 2023. We used the two Romney rams on 150 pure Lleyne ewes to breed Romney cross ewe lambs. We were impressed how easily the Romney-sired lambs were born and grew well. They have also done well at getting to a 40kg tupping weight although their mature weight is likely higher.

But, after much deliberation we decided the Romney was not best suited to fit into our breeding programme of trying to reduce labour and cost due to shearing, crutching, tail docking and getting cast. Therefore, we have decided it's going to be the wool shedding genetics we see as the future for our business at the moment.

We would like to thank the NSA and Kaiapoi Romneys for the opportunity to scratch the itch and providing the rams for us to try.

Peter Sessford Lincolnshire

I was very grateful to Rob and Jo Hodgkins for providing the Kaiapoi tup for this giveaway, which we put in with our ewe lambs. The lambs born were easy lambing and vigorous, allowing me to check them once a day at lambing after work.

The lambs grew surprisingly well considering the poor-quality grass they were on and were then weaned promptly to protect the ewe lambs and allow time to bounce back for tupping this autumn as shearlings.

A number of the lambs have been sold off grass deadweight direct to the processor, averaging 21.4kg carcass weight with 94% achieving 3 or 3H specification.



Romney lambs presented few issues for Richard and Jen.



Peter has been pleased with the lambs produced from his Kaiapoi rams.



Introducing Romneys has improved scanning in Carys' flock.

Carys Jones Carmarthenshire

The year has gone well and I have been impressed with how the Romney genetics are performing here at Carregcynffyrdd. The ram from the NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway performed well and we had more than 100 live lambs from him that grew well throughout the summer.

The Romney genetics now on-farm are giving us more live lambs per ewe with very little to no inputs. A 12% higher scanning in the Romney cross ewes compared to the improved Welsh ewes in 2024 is significantly increasing our ewe efficiency and thus our output per hectare.

My plans are to continue to increase the Romney genetics within the flock to further increase our efficiency and aim to move to 100% outdoor lambing, forage only system.

Eilidh Mae Cumbria

Following on from the NSA ram voucher competition I have had a great year being able to show and sell the lambs produced by the shearling tup I purchased from the Dutch Spotted Premier sale, Woodies Fastrack, known to me as Tracker.

Tracker was everything I had been looking for in a tup. He has power, a great skin, is very correct all around and has thrown this forwards into his lambs. I have used one of the tup lambs I retained for breeding and have lambs due from him in the next couple of weeks, which is very exciting!

The lambs produced have been solid and sharp with great carcasses. I have sold most either as finished lambs or to go on as future breeding ewes, but have also kept a couple of favourites to breed myself.

Pictured is Murtles Hakuna Matata with Judge Gemma Stanford. This lamb is sired by Woodies Fastrack. He was pulled forward as non-MV male champion at the Cumberland Show in 2024 at his first show.

I am hugely grateful for this opportunity to add Tracker's breeding into my flock, as it has provided my stock with the spark I have been looking for.



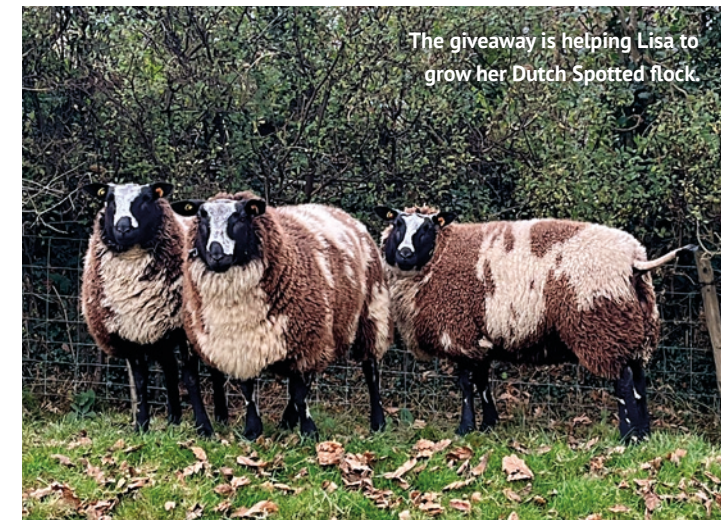
Eilidh has had success in the showing thanks to her voucher.

Lisa Lewis Carmarthenshire

The ram purchased with the voucher has worked well for us during 2024, with ease of lambing and good-sized lambs.

I have sold ewe and ram lambs privately as well as through local markets and retained ewe lambs for my flock, all thanks to the giveaway. It has been a great opportunity for me to purchase a quality ram for my flock, Saint Dutch Spotted.

Thank you to NSA and to the Dutch Spotted Sheep Society for this chance to expand the genetics in my flock. I'm looking forward to seeing what this year brings and I'm hopeful it will be another good year.



The giveaway is helping Lisa to grow her Dutch Spotted flock.

The Register of Sheep Advisers



The Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) is a network of well-rounded professional advisers working within the UK sheep industry.

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Interested in becoming an adviser?

Find out how to be accepted onto the professional register at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/rosa/become-a-rosa-adviser



The future of farming policy discussed at the Senedd and Westminster



A group of enthusiastic young sheep farmers joined NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chair Caryl Hughes and Development Officer Helen Roberts for an insightful trip to the Senedd in Cardiff in January.

The trip follows successful visits to Westminster organised specifically for the next generation of sheep farmers interested in farming policy, allowing them to meet with representatives from Welsh Government.

The group enjoyed a tour of the Senedd building before setting up to speak with members of the Senedd (MS) including Cabinet Secretary Huw Irranca-Davies, and Paul Davies, who also sponsored the visit for the group.

NSA Next Generation Ambassador and West Wales farmer Emily Jones joined the trip and comments: "It was a brilliant day. Having the opportunity to talk face to face with several influential MS's about what concerns we have as Welsh sheep farmers was really valuable."

Taking a stand in the Senedd marketplace alongside other organisations allowed the group to speak about key topics including the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) in Wales and sheep worrying by dogs. It was also a great opportunity to invite interested parties to NSA Welsh Sheep this year.

Westminster

As *Sheep Farmer* magazine arrives with members another group of young farmers will be returning from the NSA Next Generation Westminster trip. Now in its third year, this biennial visit provides a unique opportunity to go behind the scenes to learn more about how agricultural policy is created and its current influence on the sector.

The Westminster group enjoyed a visit to both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, as well as a meeting with major dignitaries and Defra representatives.

The political visit kicked off their two-day stay in London with discussions on trade hosted by Beef & Lamb New Zealand before an evening meal at the prestigious Farmers Club where Tim Farron MP, well known for his support of British agriculture, attended as an after dinner speaker giving an interesting insight into the world of Westminster and his thoughts on current and proposed agricultural policy.

The visit concluded with an informative visit and talk with the Marks and Spencer's agricultural buying team at their London HQ.



The Senedd visit offered face to face engagement with Welsh Government.



Lucy received a certificate for her NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial report

Bursary recipient meets sponsor

Recipient of one of the NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award travel bursaries in 2023/24, Lucy May Griffiths attended an Advent Feast dinner held by sponsors of the bursary, the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England (the Staple), in London in November.

Lucy was pleased to be presented with a commemorative certificate from the Staple on the evening. She says: "I would like to thank the Staple for inviting me to their Advent Feast. It was lovely to meet the people who helped to make my trip possible and I look forward to working with them again."

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Grab at all opportunities to succeed in making the most of life

By Lesley Stubbings, NSA GHMA winner



Dear Lesley... As you start the big adventure that will be your working life, I know you are excited and can't believe how lucky you are to have a job that you love.

To think it all started when you were just four years old with your first cade lamb. Every day is a new experience; how can working be this much fun you are asking?

The great news is this isn't a mirage, it will continue and you will spend the next 45 years enjoying that privilege, always learning and relishing the opportunity to apply the knowledge and experience you've gained. It really is OK to follow your instincts and passions. Few people can say they have been able to do that.

The sheep industry is full of friendly, incredibly helpful people and you will be fortunate to have the support and guidance of some amazing mentors during your career. Don't let the fact that at the start most of them are male bother you. Of course you will have to navigate some interesting situations, the risqué after dinner speakers for example, but don't be tempted to play the female card or expect any favours.

Stand up

Learn to laugh at yourself – those ram MOT photos will haunt you for a long while – and stand up to any prejudice. If you always do the best job you can the majority of people will be supportive and encouraging.



Lesley's passion for sheep started at age four.

Letter to my younger self



NSA Next Generation thrives because of the enthusiasm of older NSA officeholders to share their time, expertise and advice.

Many have enthusiastically embraced this *Sheep Farmer* feature to pen a letter to their younger selves, sharing what they wish they'd known when they were starting out. Here independent sheep consultant and past winner of the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award Lesley Stubbings gives her younger self some reflective words.

You will meet some passionate, hugely knowledgeable people over the course of your career but as you gain experience you won't always agree with them. Respect their opinions and learn from them, challenging your own ideas and broadening your horizons. There's a lot to see and learn for a girl from West Cumbria, but don't change to fit in, stay true to yourself – even if your candid northerner approach gets you into trouble now and again. You will feel honoured to be recognised by your peers in years to come.

Of course there will be challenges. Life often isn't fair and hurdles will have to be negotiated. The trick is in how you respond to setbacks and problems. Always remember human beings learn from their mistakes. No meaningful progress was ever made without some blind alleys. Every single one is a learning opportunity.



Lesley's knowledge and experience has been invaluable for so many.

Lesley was honoured to receive the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award in 2018.



At this stage having a rewarding career is paramount in your mind and I know you will not believe me when I tell you your family will take over as top priority in years to come. That said, you will be able to do both, albeit with a lot of effort, and despite your concerns you will look back and see you did manage to have it all and enjoy the love and joy that brings.

Keep motivated

Life moves fast so take the opportunities as they arise. When your elders tell you time seems to pass more quickly as you get older they are not kidding, but remember age is just a number. This keeps me motivated and I am very fortunate to be able to watch, encourage and help the next generation flourish.

As you set off on this journey, listen, learn and respect but don't let that dent your enthusiasm or confidence in your abilities. If you think it's the right thing to do, make it happen.

Finally, my best advice is to embrace the mantra you are what life makes of you but in equal measure you are what you make of life. What do I mean? Simply to get to this stage you've already come through some tough times, which could have defined you negatively. They didn't, they made you determined to succeed. All you have to do now is to grab the opportunities and make of life what you want it to be.



Soya-free feed delivers sustainable and quick finishing for Dartmoor sheep farmer

Feeding lambs soya-free, locally produced concentrate has become an important USP for Dartmoor farmer Mathew Cole.

Mathew, who lambs 2,000 ewes at Greenwell Farm and the Prison Farm on Dartmoor alongside his brother Neil, was one of the founders of Dartmoor Farmers' Association, a cooperative for local farmers.

Since its inception some 17 years ago, membership has ballooned to 115 farmers, 60 of which supply lambs.

'It was developed when farm payments were decoupled to create a strong voice by working together. We can tell our story better as a collective,' says Mathew. He is one of these 60 suppliers and says while his farm is inherently environmentally friendly, by the very nature of its location in Dartmoor's National Park, lambs do require hard feed to achieve a good level of finish.

'Hard feed helps give animals a leg up and gets them ready for market because we can't do it on grass alone,' adds Mathew.

At Greenwell, sheep are run extensively, grazing 2,000 acres of permanent pasture across in-bye, hill and common land. Mathew adds: 'Feeding Massey Harpers Greenwell Planet Lamb Finisher Nuts is another feather in our cap. It's all about building provenance for our product.'

The 15% protein Nuts have been specially formulated without soya and instead include barley, wheat gluten, sugar beet pellets and maize distillers, alongside rapeseed meal.

About the sheep system

Traditional sheep breeds are used at Greenwell that can thrive in Dartmoor's harsh conditions. 'You must keep the right sort of animals and manage it sustainably. Farming in Dartmoor is like farming on a wet rock. We have acidic, shallow and peaty soils,' explains Mathew.

Breeds include Whitefaced Dartmoor and Blackface ewes, alongside a flock of Bluefaced Leicesters, which are mated to Blackfaced ewes to produce Mule breeding lambs. Progeny from this flock is sold at Tavistock Market as an autumn cash crop.

The remaining lambs are fattened and sold through Dartmoor Farmers' Association.

Lambing is staggered over six weeks from late March and starts indoors with the Whitefaced Dartmoor and Bluefaced Leicester flocks. The Blackfaced flock is lambed outdoors unless ewes are carrying triplets. Typically, lambing percentage averages 120% and lambs take 7-8 months to finish.

Nutrition

Most lambs reside on hill or common ground with their mothers until weaning in late July/early August. Greenwell Planet Lamb Finisher Nuts are first introduced to the Mule lambs and then wether lambs, followed by others in groups as lambs edge closer to finishing.

'We give them ad-lib creep for 4-6 weeks to get them up to weight and put condition on them.' Lambs are gradually transitioned onto ad-lib creep from grass to prevent acidosis and rapid changes to their diet.

'We always have a batch of ewes and lambs we feed from birth, and these teach other lambs to eat from troughs. Once they are all eating out of troughs, we transition them to ad-lib using creep feeders.'

Mathew has been using the Greenwell Planet Lamb Finisher Nuts since July 2022 and is impressed with the quality. 'Lambs gain weight quickly, and within 4-6 weeks, they are ready for sale. We've been very happy with how Massey Harpers Feed has taken lambs forward and got them to specification.'

Mathew says lambs are generally achieving 15-21kg deadweight at O+ and R grades with fat classes of 3. He says feeding creep enables them to finish lambs and add value rather than having to sell them as stores.

Adding value

Mathew has been an early adopter of environmental schemes, the most recent being the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

'We are also looking at Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier and Landscape Recovery when it becomes available,' he says. 'Hill lambs are often deemed lower value, but they deliver vital value to the landscape and selling through Dartmoor Farmers' Association helps us realise a better value for our lambs.'

Feeding soya-free, low food miles creep was another piece of the puzzle in helping to reduce the farm's carbon footprint, he says. The product is manufactured just 31 miles from Mathew's farm. 'Every step we take towards a more sustainable future is positive. We want sustainable environments and businesses, and I believe the two can co-exist.'



Farm facts

- 2,000 acres of grassland and moorland, as well as common ground.
- 2,000 ewes consisting of Whitefaced Dartmoors, Blackfaced Leicesters.
- 250 suckler cows - Belted Galloway, Galloway and South Devon.
- Undertaking environmental schemes, including the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Mid-Tier and Higher-Level Stewardship.

NSA Welsh Sheep hosts to showcase sustainable sheep production

By Gaina Morgan, Contributor

The spectacular back drop of the Black Mountains distinguishes the home farm of the NSA Welsh Sheep hosts this year.

Tregoyd Farm, Brecon, Powys, just 15 minutes from Hay on Wye on the English/Welsh border, is home to hosts Penny Chantler and sons Will and Sam Sawday. High Country Romney's is the farming partnership. The farm's focus is to breed rams to suit low input, sustainable systems.

NSA Welsh Sheep 2025 is an opportunity to showcase sustainability in the face of environmental change.

The farming system was initiated by Penny and her late husband, Richard, 30 years ago. The 1,500-ewe flock now comprises internationally renowned Romneys and RomTex.

The 600-ewe stud flock and 900-ewe commercial flock are part of a forage based,

outdoor lambing system on a farm where land rises to 1,400ft (427m) above sea level. The family describes the Romney as the ultimate in low input, maternal sheep, considering the breed to be highly efficient and able to thrive in all UK conditions, with proven worm resistance and an impressive performance off grass.

The RomTex combines the New Zealand Texel's terminal traits to produce an easy lambing, good milking ewe. Will comments: "They rear very fast-growing lambs achieving better grades and killing out percentages. Cleaner heads and legs also make them more suited to liveweight trading."

Imports

Underpinning the stud flocks are regular ram imports from some of New Zealand's best flocks. Highly detailed monitoring and data capture is key, backed by 30 years of performance recording with Sheep Improvement Ltd (SIL), the New Zealand equivalent to Signet.

Will says: "We look at what the future challenges are, and cost, weather and disease stand very proudly. I think we can only manage what we have control of and reducing our reliance on upstream resources without heavily comprising yield seems like a no brainer. Derisking farm businesses across all sectors is a massive goal.

"Taking out the big financial drains on sheep businesses makes farming a lot less stressful. Reducing labour frees up time to spend on other enterprises, to work off-farm or even take time off. Genetics can play a key part in addressing these



factors and this style of breeding can enable thriving businesses."

Richard Chantler founded the family's flock 40 years ago, when he was head shepherd for Wye College in Kent. His Nuffield scholarship to New Zealand allowed him to study progressive stud flocks. The college's successful breeding programme using New Zealand Romney genetics improved the productivity and efficiency of British Romneys. The link to New Zealand has continued down the years, with Penny, Will and Sam continuing to make shopping trips to source genetics.

Management

High Country Romneys now includes the tenanted Tregoyd Farm and other smaller blocks of land in the Hay-on-Wye area. Little infrastructure, machinery or labour, combined with the geographical locations of the blocks of land, means the sheep system needs to be simple and low input. This allows time to spend on stud data management and ram sales as well as running their secondary enterprise – calf rearing.

The farm takes batches of 170 calves through the Blade scheme and rears them on milk for 12 weeks until they go to a finisher. They have a small amount of part time help with the calves and just one loader tractor. Contractors are then utilised as much as possible. Sam says: "We want to be sat on tractors for as little time as possible and we want to be paying for them even less."

The three main groups of sheep are looked after by the brothers. Will takes responsibility for performance recording and genetics. Sam heads up the calf rearing. Penny fills in the gaps and enjoys sharing her deep knowledge of wool, having studied textile design at Leeds University and being a southern region board member for British Wool.

The farm tries to do its best environmentally. Stewardship schemes and grants are utilised as much as possible and regenerative practices are being adopted to improve soil and animal health – practices they believe will improve environmental and financial resilience.

Ram lambs are initially selected on raw performance and EBVs, with a big focus on the post-weaning worm challenge. The latter determines the lamb's resistance and resilience to worms.

Parasites

The aim of these programmes is to identify ram lambs that don't need drenching and can grow well, despite being faced with a heavy worm challenge.

The programmes are complicated. They entail constant weighing and monitoring and the collection of around 200 faecal samples from individual ram lambs. Blood IgA samples are also taken from these rams to improve accuracy.

Lambing begins in April, with all the ewes out, having been on forage crops for two months. This is followed by grass rotations from the beginning of March until lambing.

The family find minimal assistance – as low as 1% – is required for ewes at lambing and if animals need to be brought in they are marked to be culled post weaning. The recorded stud sheep are tagged and recorded at birth and ewes and lambs are then bunched into big groups of 400-500 ewes, rotationally grazed through summer.

Data is regularly collected from weaning until autumn, including regular weighing, back fat scanning, as well as the resistance and resilience programmes. Lambs that don't meet standards are sold store in local markets or finished and sold deadweight.

The 900 or so lambs, mostly fed on grass, are sold from August through to March. Ram lambs that make the cut based on their performance data, EBVs and visual appraisal are wintered on grass and sold as shearlings privately off farm.

Genetics

The work to progress farm performance is ongoing. The farm has been a part of Farming Connect's Welsh Sheep Genetics Programme, which funds the collection of additional data such as back fat scanning, FEC and IgA samples.

Furthermore, it is allowing rams to be put through a portable accumulation chamber to measure methane output and measure carcass data from a CT scanner. DNA samples will also be taken to ascertain genomic breeding values to make current breeding values more accurate.

The overall aim is to produce genetically proven rams with the resilience required to adapt to a rapidly changing world. The family is continually working to adjust its sheep to a more sustainable system, well able to weather unpredictable environmental and economic change.

And the family believes it's important to enjoy the journey, sharing with others the joy of sustainable sheep farming. Farm visitors are frequently welcomed to farm tours and talks, and this year the farm will play host to NSA Welsh Sheep. The event will offer a professional update



Farm facts

- New Zealand genetics have influenced the farm's flock of Romney and RomTex ewes.
- Performance recording allows the selection of top-quality stock for sale and integration into the flock.
- Visitors to NSA Welsh Sheep will be able to view the system via tractor farm tours.
- The sheep enterprise is complemented by a calf rearing enterprise.

and the latest industry information, as well as a chance for sheep farmers to get together while having the opportunity to view the impressive enterprise.

Penny concludes: "We are really looking forward to hosting NSA Welsh Sheep and hope the opportunity for visitors to view our system is an added incentive to attend. The event is always a much enjoyed and valued date in the farming calendar. We hope to see many of you there." See page 6 for NSA Welsh Sheep details.

“We are really looking forward to hosting NSA Welsh Sheep and hope the opportunity for visitors to view our system is an added incentive to attend.” Penny Chantler

Breeding low input ram lambs is a key focus.

The addition of RomTex ewes has enhanced the flock further.

Farm business planning 2025: Learning lessons for a better future

By Brian Richardson, Virgin Money

The new year is often a time of reflection on the past and the chance to look forward with new vigour and planning.

Farming has certainly seen some considerable challenges over the last few years, and it is important to see what has been learnt from meeting those challenges, and how you can align your business for the future. I suspect 2025 will see further changes in the sector, so it is critical to keep your business operating at the top of its game to best deal with the adversities and the opportunities that may arise.

It is easy for armchair experts to suggest what you should be doing with your business, but the complexities and variables in farming mean each business will have different circumstances and priorities. I suggest focussing on four areas: succession planning, farm efficiencies and costs, support mechanisms and looking after yourself.

Budget challenges

When it comes to succession planning, the changes to Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and inheritance tax are far-reaching for many. With potential changes coming in from 2026, it really should be a priority for any farming business to look at succession and potential tax liabilities.

I recommend talking with professionals. It is clear there is a pathway for the majority to mitigate potential liabilities, but each case will be different and for many it will involve bringing forward family decisions and discussions around succession.

Taking time to speak with advisers is important, as is talking to your wider family to understand their aspirations and how best to maintain the family farm for years to come. Changes to farm structures will also have implications for the

business so it is vital to take the time to make sure you get an outcome that works for you, your family and your business.

Farming suffers from low margins and many variables influencing performance so understanding farm efficiencies and costs is key to financial survival. As I travel around and visit farms, I am often struck by the differences in performance and costs that each – doing broadly the same job – are prepared to accept.

Benchmarking and research are key and with today's technology there is an abundance of data



Looking after yourself should be top of the 2025 priorities list.

to review and compare. Any time spent collating the farm's performance, both input and output, will be time well spent. Setting some objectives to improve performance for the year ahead will focus your mind.

Some of the best benchmarking begins with sitting down with a neighbour to compare figures, and there is also considerable relevant information online. I'd suggest using your advisers to be critical and make suggestions, or to even complete some formal business reviews for you.

Another method for business security is to

make the most of new support mechanisms. The last four years have seen the replacement of historic EU schemes with new UK government farm support and a shift from universal payments to grants by application, generating a significant re-allocation of support funding. The last Budget saw further significant reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme so replacing lost money becomes more vital than ever.

New schemes

Some will have felt the new schemes are complicated and in some farming sectors better returns may have masked the loss. Whatever your position, it is worth revisiting the support arrangements available to ensure you fully understand what is available to you. If it is right for your business get an application in.

Support budgets are unlikely to increase and, given the government has worked hard to make them as accessible as possible, it is important you continue to get your share of what is available.

Finally and most importantly you need to look after yourself. Farming is often a lonely business and farmers aren't good at looking after themselves, particularly when it comes to mental health. The recent changes to inheritance tax brought out a real flood of concern from many about the future, so talk to others about your concerns and reach out

to farming charities who can always provide more direct support.

We should all look out for signs of stress and challenges with mental health in others in the farming sector we meet. Offer support or signpost help where those challenges appear.

Farming is a resilient industry and I strongly feel it has a positive future ahead, but that future won't be easy. Keeping your own business under review gives you the best chance to be successful in terms of performance and hopefully profitability.

Sheep Farmer magazine
promote your services to the UK sheep sector from just £30 for NSA members.
Speak to Helen Roberts.
See page 2 for contact details.



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Another year of discounted shearing courses open to YFC members

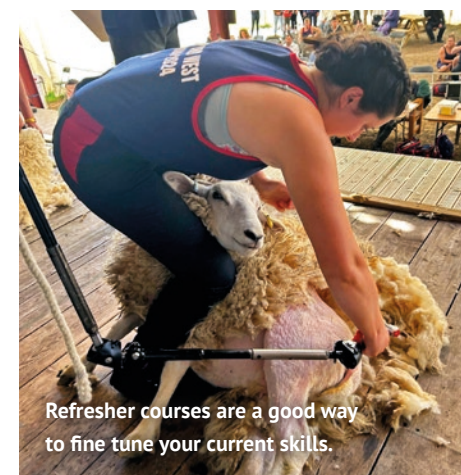


British and Ulster Wool have confirmed it will again be offering discount for YFC members on shearing courses this year.

British Wool says its shearing courses are recognised across the world and tailored to individual levels of ability – from an absolute beginner (blue seal) to an advanced stage (gold seal). Course content is designed to achieve several objectives from shearing your flock more efficiently and effectively, building foundations for career entry opportunities and supporting entry at global competitions of the highest standards.

On-farm training

One-day on-farm machine and blading shearing training courses are also available ranging from those having no experience to professional shearers travelling the world. More than 100 courses are held throughout the UK, led by a



Refresher courses are a good way to fine tune your current skills.

team of registered and experienced instructors and usually delivered over two days from April to August. Last year these courses were attended by over 800 people.

For the seventh year in a row any young farmers who are a member of the YFC can take advantage of a 50% discount on a British Wool shearing course for the duration of their membership. This offer includes participation in both machine and blade shearing courses.

British Wool says the courses cover the essential aspects of achieving a successful shearing season, including the use of shearing equipment and hands-on shearing practice to develop your technique.

The exclusive price of this training is £132 including VAT for YFC members, with the standard cost being £264. This offer is valid for YFC members registering before 31st March 2025.

Fleece presentation is key in ensuring wool is presented correctly and to a high standard. Wool handling courses, delivered over one day, are also being discounted for YFC members.

Continued learning

Jack Robinson, Ulster Wool Ambassador and shearing instructor, comments on the value of shearing courses: "In 2004 I attended my first beginner's course and I attended every year after, doing an advanced course in later years. I started instructing for Ulster Wool in 2019, which I really enjoy. Attending these courses has helped me improve my skills. You always learn something from different shearers. Even now as an open



YFC members receive a 50% discount on shearing courses.

shearer, I continue to learn from others on how to do the cleanest job. This is better for the sheep, but also better for the wool".

Mr Robinson recommends the courses to potential new trainees coming into the industry, saying: "It's a great opportunity to learn a new skill, and if you're willing to work hard and put in the practice, you'll succeed. It's good to attend multiple courses because there's so much to remember at once – from your balance, where your feet go, to your non-dominate hand – everything has to be taken into consideration when learning how to shear well and safely.

"I'd recommended attending a course once a year, or a refresher every few years to keep you on the right track, as it's really easy to pick up bad habits."

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What a Schmallerberg storm looks like from inside the lambing shed

By Nicola Noble,NSA

With cases of Schmallerberg virus (SBV) on the increase in areas of the UK not affected last year, Michael Goldie shares his experience in hope it helps prepare others.

Mr Goldie and wife Helen have been breeding pedigree Suffolks for more than 60 years. Running 100 ewes with a mix of pedigree and Mule type recipis – ewes that are implanted with embryos – on 200 acres (80ha) of mixed grazing at Harpercroft Farm in Dundonald, Ayrshire, Mr Goldie combines farming alongside his employment with NFU Mutual.

Mr Goldie was slightly disappointed with his scan results from the recipis but put it down to a police helicopter worrying incident a month after they had been implanted. "Our scanning in the main flock was successful but the results from embryo transplant weren't where we might have hoped," he says.

When a few pedigree ewes aborted a month before lambing, Mr Goldie wasn't concerned too much as the numbers weren't significant in relation to the total due to lamb.

"We started lambing in late December and it quickly became apparent we had a serious problem. The first signs were lambs not presenting themselves correctly in the birth channel, limp heads/neck, deformities and almost every lamb difficult to get out. Then we had obvious cases of deformed lambs, mainly fused limbs and little or no muscle mass – thus rendering them difficult to lamb and unable to stand or survive when born," he continues.

Some live lambs didn't present any visible signs of illness but there were lots of live lambs with respiratory issues, some struggling to pass meconium and just not doing well.

Widespread

"At first we didn't appreciate how widespread these problems were, but once we understood this was a knock-on effect we were able to treat those affected quickly and effectively," he says. Lambs were examined four times a day for several days, checking for issues and administering appropriate treatment.

"This was critical as we were already losing significant numbers of lambs at birth so we needed to save what we could of the visibly unaffected lambs," he adds. Around 90 lambs have been lost so far out of 150 scanned, with six ewes still left to lamb.

"Distressingly, most lambs were born alive – even the most deformed. After having to deal with euthanising more than 40 of these myself, it all became too much, and we called our vet to put down large batches." Despite all their efforts, this was their best option to allow them to look after the less badly affected lambs to ensure they survived.

Schmallerberg can prevent the onset of labour so to avoid any remaining ewes going over their due date and having larger deformed lambs, under veterinary advice the decision was made to induce all remaining ewes.

"We worked extremely hard caring for the lambs without external physical deformities but ultimately only the strong survived. We took a chance on a few but over a nursing period of around 10 days post-lambing, most of the weakest lambs didn't survive.

"I just want to raise awareness about how it could impact you and maybe give some factual things to help if you find yourselves affected. Its certainly got me thinking long and hard about what the way forward looks like," he says.



SBV is affecting different areas of the country than last year.

Challenges

"It appears likely there will be significantly increased disease challenges for early lambing flocks but what would also appear to be an ever-extending risk period due to the different climatic conditions we are experiencing – which will likely result in some of the not so early lambing flocks being exposed to risk too."

Mr Goldie says there shouldn't be a stigma to SBV or bluetongue virus. He believes we all need to work together to control its impacts, because both viruses are indiscriminate in terms of who they infect. "You just have to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and you're wiped out by it," he concludes.

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Tuesday 1st July 2025
22 Gortnagross Road, Dungiven, Co. Londonderry.

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NSA is also planning regional events such as Field Days, farm walks and more – check *Sheep Farmer* magazine, the NSA website and other NSA communications for updates.



Michael has farmed Suffolks for decades.



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Ensuring ewes have an optimum diet during pregnancy reduces twin lamb risks.



Understanding twin lamb disease to help avoid it in your flock this lambing

As lambing time approaches, the perennial problem of pregnancy toxoemia will become an issue for shepherds and veterinarians alike.

More commonly known as twin lamb disease, it is a condition many of us who have cared for pregnant ewes will be all too familiar with.

The signs in the initial stages of the disease can be subtle, but a ewe isolating herself from the flock, or hanging back slightly, should start to ring alarm bells. She will also go off her feed, not joining her flock mates in the scrum at the trough.

If left untreated, her condition will deteriorate rapidly. She may become uncoordinated and wobbly, sometimes even going blind. Ultimately, she will go off her legs, collapse and slip into a coma before succumbing to the disease.

Metabolic challenges

So why does twin lamb disease progress from mild behavioural changes all the way to death? Ewes in late pregnancy face significant metabolic challenges. Around 70% of foetal growth occurs in the last eight weeks of pregnancy. To support this rapid growth, lambs require ever-increasing amounts of glucose from their mother.

Logically, the ewe should compensate by increasing her feed intake – but, this is not always

straightforward. As the lambs grow rapidly within the ewe, they take up more and more space within the abdomen, compressing the rumen. This reduction in rumen space limits feed intake, hindering the ewe's ability to consume sufficient nutrients to meet the demands of pregnancy.



Scanning allows ewes nutritional needs to be better understood.

To compensate for the reduced feed intake the ewe must mobilise her fat stores. As fat is broken down to produce glucose other substances called ketones are also produced. Ketones can provide an alternative energy source for many tissues, but the brain struggles to utilise them effectively. As ketone levels in the blood rise and glucose levels drop, the brain becomes effectively starved

of glucose, leading to the observed neurological signs including odd behaviour, wobbliness, and ultimately coma and death.

Hypocalcaemia

Reduced feed intake and the increased demand for calcium for both lamb growth and the initiation of milk production can also lead to hypocalcaemia (calcium deficiency) in ewes. Calcium deficiency further inhibits the ewe's ability to produce glucose, exacerbating the effects of twin lamb disease.

Hypocalcaemia itself can present with similar clinical signs as twin lamb disease, making it difficult to differentiate between the two conditions without specific blood tests. Many ewes suffering from twin lamb disease will also experience a calcium deficiency at the same time.

Studies have shown ewes with twin lamb disease exhibit elevated levels of inflammatory markers in their blood. This systemic inflammation further inhibits the ewe's ability to produce glucose and contributes significantly to the severity of the disease and the risk of mortality. Studies have also shown the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) alongside supportive energy therapy can significantly improve ewe survival rates by 50%, a finding which mirrors first-hand experience in veterinary practice of treating these cases.

Treatment of twin lamb disease focuses on addressing the three primary issues – energy deficiency, calcium deficiency and inflammation.

Energy deficiency

The energy deficiency can be corrected by giving glucose, but this only works if it is administered intravenously. Oral glucose in ruminants is lost in the rumen as the natural bacteria living in the rumen quickly take any glucose administered orally for themselves, meaning none actually makes it as far as our intended target – the ewe.

What we can give orally are glucose precursors, namely propionate, glycerol and propylene-glycol. These substances are of little interest to the rumen bacteria, but the ewe can quickly and easily use them to make glucose for herself.

Calcium can be administered intravenously or subcutaneously as calcium borogluconate. Oral calcium supplements are also available and can provide more sustained calcium support. While both injectable and oral calcium can be effective, oral administration is generally easier and more practical for most.

The use of NSAIDs is crucial for managing the inflammatory component of twin lamb disease. NSAIDs help to reduce inflammation, improve glucose utilisation and enhance overall ewe

wellbeing. I always advise the use of NSAIDs whenever treating cases of twin lamb.

Prevention is always the most effective approach to managing twin lamb disease. Optimising nutrition by ensuring ewes are in good body condition before breeding is essential. Providing a balanced and adequate diet throughout pregnancy is crucial to managing nutrition.

Pregnancy scanning allows for the identification of ewes carrying multiple lambs. This enables targeted nutritional management, with ewes carrying multiple lambs receiving increased levels of high-energy feeds to meet their increased energy demands.

Monitoring

Early detection and prompt identification of affected ewes is critical for successful treatment outcomes. Finally, regular flock health monitoring for any signs of illness or nutritional deficiencies is essential. But if you spot the early signs of twin lamb, my personal choice for providing energy and calcium is a combination product,

which provides multiple sources of energy and a calcium supply in one product.

Twin lamb disease can be a significant challenge for sheep flocks, but it doesn't have to be. By understanding the underlying causes, recognising the early signs, and implementing effective treatment and prevention strategies, you can minimise the impact of this condition and improve the overall health and wellbeing of your ewes.

We hope this information empowers you to better manage this condition within your flock and hopefully reduce the number of cases you encounter this season.



Twin lamb disease and hypocalcaemia show similar symptoms.



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Read up on advice for tackling infectious abortion in sheep

By Sarah Thomson, Moredun



Infectious abortion poses significant challenges to sheep farming, affecting both productivity and animal welfare.

A variety of pathogens, including bacteria, viruses and parasites, can cause abortion in sheep, with more than one involved in a significant proportion of cases.

It is vital to submit aborted lambs and placental material for veterinary investigation to determine the cause of death. Blood sampling can also be used at the time of abortion and to screen barren ewes to confirm exposure to a number of these pathogens. The zoonotic risk – risk of disease transfer to humans – posed by the majority of these pathogens must always be considered.

Common causes

In the UK, the most common pathogens are *Chlamydia abortus* (EAE), *Toxoplasma gondii* and campylobacter species. Others include salmonella species, listeria species, Schmallenberg virus and *Coxiella burnetii* (Q fever).

Abortions due to EAE typically occur late in pregnancy, often resulting in stillborn lambs two to three weeks before the expected lambing date, or the birth of weak lambs that don't survive beyond 48 hours. The infection can spread rapidly if uncontained, leading to substantial losses.

Control strategies include:

- Sourcing ewes from EAE-free accredited flocks to prevent introducing infection.
- Using diagnostic blood tests to confirm flock infection status and submitting aborted lambs and placental material for veterinary investigation.
- Isolating aborted ewes for seven to 10 days and disposing of abortion materials safely.
- Disinfecting lambing pens thoroughly and re-bedding with clean straw.

- Vaccinating where supply issues don't present challenges.
- Following diagnosis and discussion with your vet, finding other treatment options that may be suitable for your flock.

Sheep contract *T. gondii* by ingesting oocysts from pasture or feed/water contaminated by infected cat faeces. The timing of infection determines the outcome. Early pregnancy infections may cause foetal reabsorption, while later infections can result in abortion close to the due date or the birth of live, weakly lambs. Ewes develop lifelong immunity after infection. Control strategies include:

- Limiting cat access to feed, water and pastures.
- Maintaining clean feed bins.
- Submitting aborted lambs and placental material for veterinary investigation.
- Blood sampling to confirm exposure.
- Vaccinating where supply issues don't present challenges.

It is important to be aware no curative treatment exists for toxoplasmosis.

Campylobacter-induced abortions typically occur in the last six weeks of pregnancy. In some cases, lambs are born alive but are too weak to survive. Infected ewes develop lifelong immunity. Infection occurs by ingesting contaminated faeces or abortion material from aborting ewes.

Control strategies include:

- Maintaining a closed flock to minimise the risk of introducing carriers.
- Isolating newly purchased sheep and any ewes that have aborted.
- Removing contaminated materials to prevent ingestion by others in the flock.
- Staggering lambing or reduce stocking densities to reduce bacterial spread.
- Keeping feed and water systems clean and allowing ample access.
- Submitting aborted lambs and placental material for veterinary investigation.

Campylobacter vaccinations are not routinely available in the UK but one can be sourced through your vet using a special import authorisation. Alternatively, if diagnosed, an autogenous vaccine can be generated for future years.

Sheep contract *Coxiella burnetii* through the inhalation of contaminated dust or aerosols. It can cause sudden abortion storms late in pregnancy or weak lambs that may die shortly after birth.



Investigating aborted lambs can confirm the cause and help protect the flock.

Moredun's research

The Moredun Research Institute is advancing the fight against infectious abortion through:

- Development of safer, more effective vaccines.
- Creation of pen-side tests for rapid detection of *C. abortus* to allow prompt isolation of affected ewes.
- Diagnostic tools to distinguish between vaccinated and infected animals.
- Identification of biomarkers to detect antibiotic-resistant bacteria for targeted treatment, combating antimicrobial resistance.

Control strategies include:

- Reducing exposure to infected materials by maintaining good hygiene and proper disposal of abortion products.
- Submitting aborted lambs and placental material for veterinary investigation.
- Vaccination using a recently licensed vaccine that undertook trials at Moredun.

Infectious abortion impacts lambing success and farm profitability, so having a proactive flock health management plan produced in conjunction with vets and/or advisers is recommended. General mitigation methods include implementing strict biosecurity measures, following a comprehensive vaccination program after speaking to your vet and/or advisers, ensuring a hygienic lambing environment and using routine flock health monitoring with diagnostic testing.

By adopting these practices you can reduce the incidence of infectious abortions leading to healthier flocks and improved productivity. [Moredun fact sheets available at www.moredun.org.uk/resources](http://www.moredun.org.uk/resources).



Good hygiene can reduce disease risks in lambing sheds.

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Sign and symptoms of neurological conditions in newborn lambs

By Rudolf Reichel, APHA
Animal & Plant Health Agency

Sometimes at lambing time, it's hard to know if a lamb is just slow to take or whether there is something more serious going on.

A wide range of clinical signs you may see in newborn lambs are indicative of the presence of a neurological condition. These can include being comatose, blind, weak, slow or dumb, recumbent, paddling, stargazing, unable to progress to normal or expected behaviour – such as standing and sucking – uncoordinated or unbalanced movement, abnormal vocalisation, shaking and head bobbing, paresis or paralysis and not responding to touch or sound. These signs could appear individually or in combination.

In some cases, the affected lamb may also have an abnormal external appearance. For example:

- An abnormal head shape, for example dome shaped.
- An abnormal body shape, for example twisted and rigid limbs and spine.
- Abnormal fleece.
- Abnormal or absent eyes.

Categories

Neurological diseases can be divided into the following broad categories:

Infectious. Viruses such as Schmallenberg, bluetongue and Border disease can infect the developing foetus, known as an intra-uterine infection. Bacterial causes of abortion, such as enzootic abortion in ewes, can cause indirect neurological conditions in newborn lambs because of damage to the placenta.

Toxic. Treatments or medications that should not be given to a pregnant ewe, such as albendazole wormer, have the potential to cause damage to the developing nervous system in the foetus.

Genetic. Conditions where there is a genetic defect leading to abnormal development of the brain or spinal cord. One example is Dandy-Walker malformation.

Mechanical. A prolonged or difficult birth may result in physical trauma to the lamb or cause a period where the lamb was starved of oxygen, and both can result in neurological signs.

Metabolic. If the pregnant ewe suffered from a lack of nutrition and became hypoglycaemic (low blood glucose) at a susceptible time, it may result in damage to the developing brain of the foetus.



Weak lambs with limited vigour could have a neurological condition.

What is a neurological condition?

These are conditions where the nervous system – the brain, spinal cord or nerves – is affected at the time of birth. The damage to the foetus may have occurred during pregnancy or happened during the birth process. These are different to conditions that develop at a later stage, such as bacterial meningitis.

Neoplastic. Very rarely the newborn lamb may have developed a tumour or growth that affects the brain or spinal cord.

Looking at these in more detail, Schmallenberg virus infection of the pregnant dam can lead to a range of problems, from resorption leading to barren ewes, to abortions and stillbirths. Classical presentation of this disease is a stillborn lamb with twisted rigid body and limbs (arthrogryposis), but some cases may be born alive.

Those born alive may have damage to the brain and spinal cord, with neurological signs likely to persist with no improvement. Some affected lambs may have no external visible changes. There are other causes of stillbirths with arthrogryposis, so testing is important to confirm the infection.

Bluetongue virus infection of the pregnant dam can lead to resorption, abortions or stillbirths and the birth of live but brain-damaged lambs. As with Schmallenberg, there can be a range of neurological signs in lambs born alive with a damaged brain and will not be unique or specific to bluetongue infection. Arthrogryposis has not been recorded with bluetongue virus infections in sheep.

Border disease is one of the better-known causes and is common. The classic presentation is described as hairy shaker where the affected

lamb has a hairy fleece, difficulty standing and rapid uncoordinated movements of the whole body and head. Not every affected lamb will show this classic presentation. Some will have only mild nervous signs and be able to feed, and thrive, but may have a reduced growth rate and an increased susceptibility to other diseases.

Enzootic abortion in ewes and other causes of abortion cause damage to the placenta, which in some cases is not severe enough to result in abortion but reduces the transfer of nutrients and oxygen to the developing foetus. This can result in the birth of a live but small and weak lamb with slow responses and reactions.

Diagnosis

In some cases the cause may be obvious, such as a weak lamb after a prolonged birth. In most cases, the cause will not be obvious and it is important to investigate with the help of your vet. Some of the causes may affect others in the flock and may be preventable. A diagnosis is therefore important to enable management actions to avoid or limit further cases. Treatment and control should be discussed with your vet.

Dealing with such cases can be distressing, so please remember that there is help and support available to help.

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Avoiding unintended consequences of supplementary colostrum

With the main lambing season fast approaching, and some well underway, new on-farm research is highlighting the serious unintended consequences of poor colostrum storage and equipment hygiene.

Research undertaken by the University of Glasgow and the Monitor Farm Scotland programme during last year's lambing on a typical commercial flock discovered 80% of the farm's supplementary colostrum tested failed total bacterial count tests.

High bacterial counts cause several serious issues, explains Ali Haggerty, a vet at Stewartry Veterinary Centre, Dumfriesshire. "Lambs have no antibodies of their own at birth and are reliant on the transfer of antibodies from maternal colostrum across the gut to gain immunity to disease in the first few weeks of life," she says.

"Bacteria can inhibit the transfer of passive immunity to the lamb, can break up the antibodies in colostrum rendering them ineffective, and block the uptake of antibodies across the lamb's gut. They can also damage the gut itself meaning antibodies can no longer cross, and can cause disease in their own right."

Thresholds

When looking at coliforms – the bugs that can be particularly responsible for the deleterious effects on colostrum and are associated with faecal contamination – research found 60% of samples on-farm exceeded acceptable thresholds.

While the results may seem shocking, bacteria can quickly multiply, Ms Haggerty explains. "Bacteria grow exponentially and can double their population very, very rapidly. Colostrum left at ambient temperature—like you might find sitting in a container or feeding equipment in the lambing shed while you're busy working around the pens—offers both the optimal temperature and nutrients to speed up bacterial growth by shortening their doubling time.

"As an example, bacteria like E.coli can have a generation time of 20-30 minutes, so if we start with, say 1,000 bacteria, the population could increase to 2,000 in 20 minutes, 4,000 in 40 minutes and 8,000 in an hour and so on," she adds.

Critical message

"The critical message for anyone lambing is these results indicate where colostrum has not been stored correctly and/or equipment is not properly cleaned, giving supplementary colostrum to lambs has the potential to cause more harm than good," she warns.

"But, some samples on-farm were impressively clean with very low counts, showing achieving clean samples is possible."

The aim should be to minimise the number of lambs routinely supplemented with colostrum and to suckle ewes directly, as this can be a hygienic option where pen hygiene is maintained through regularly disinfecting and re-bedding. It also improves the crucial maternal bond.

"This is not always possible, so use time pre-lambing to review your colostrum storage and equipment hygiene protocols so it can be done consistently well, even at the height of lambing," Ms Haggerty adds.

Setting up a lambing shed kitchen is one way to make colostrum management and hygiene easier and more consistent during lambing she suggests.

"Ideally, this would include instant hot water, electric, space to work, a sink and the required detergents, such as basic washing up liquid, a disinfectant and appropriate bottle brushes and so on," she says.

A working fridge is an important part of the set-up as bacteria multiply very quickly. It must chill at a consistent 4°C temperature. Colostrum should be stored in a covered or sealed container to minimise contamination with organic matter.



Clean equipment and good shed hygiene are essential during lambing.



Risk reduction tips

- Check all equipment for any damage, as perishing areas can harbour bacteria as well as harming lambs' throats.
- Before lambing and after every use, clean all storage and feeding equipment thoroughly with a scrubbing brush, detergent and hot water and then disinfect. Ensure all the fatty milk/colostrum deposits are removed as these harbour bacteria. Also keep disinfectant fresh and clean – organic matter deactivates it and it can become a bacterial soup.
- Purchase multiple feeders to allow for thorough cleaning after every use.
- Chill colostrum at 4°C (for up to 24 hours) if not fed immediately to prevent bacterial proliferation.
- Alternatively freeze excess colostrum at -20°C for up to six months. Thaw in a warm water bath at 30-40°C before feeding.
- Ewe colostrum is always best for supplementation if it can be handled appropriately. For example, used quickly or frozen promptly after collection and defrosted in a warm water bath.
- Consideration could be given to a good quality colostrum replacer made up as required, as opposed to prolonged colostrum storage at room temperature. All mixing equipment must be thoroughly cleaned every time.

Ensure colostrum is appropriately stored to prevent bacteria multiplying.



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Colostrum is critical in providing immunity for newborn lambs.

Preventing infections and improving survivability in the lambing shed

By Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

'Plan, prevent, protect' is a mantra often used in connection with lambing time and now is the time to plan ahead and prepare the lambing shed, to prevent unnecessary infections and to protect against unwanted disease.

We all know newborn lambs born into unhygienic conditions with inadequate navel protection are at an increased risk of infections and even death. Infections are more prevalent in poor weather conditions, especially when it's wet and muddy and even inside when farmers are not able to get ewes and lambs out to pasture as quickly as they would like. This leads to more cramped lambing sheds that are harder to keep clean.

Unfortunately, joint ill can even be an issue in very well managed flocks in apparently clean sheds, partly because the bacteria *Streptococcus dysgalactiae*, which usually causes joint ill, can survive on dry hay, straw or soil for several weeks.

Bacteria infect a lamb through the navel or wounds, such as those caused by ear tagging, and then spread through the bloodstream causing disease, inflammation, abscesses or even death.

Signs of infection may include a swollen, painful navel that does not dry out or sometimes just weakness, fever and lack of appetite. The signs of joint ill are swollen, stiff, painful joints that may be hot to the touch, fever, lack of appetite and depression. Euthanasia is commonly required on welfare grounds.

Cleanliness

Good hygiene minimises the risk of infections. Lime can be spread on concrete, while clean, deep bedding and dry lying spaces are advisable. Individual pens should be cleaned out after each ewe or at least well re-bedded to minimise the spread of infection. There is new evidence to

suggest wood shavings are preferable to straw in reducing bacterial survival in the environment.

All lambs should receive 200ml/kg body weight of good quality ewe colostrum – which is 26.5% or more on a Brix refractometer – in the first 24 hours of their lives. This allows antibodies to be received across the gut wall giving them early passive immunity against many common environmental infections. All infections and diseases rise dramatically if lambs do not get antibodies from the colostrum.



Treatment of the ear before tagging is important to prevent infections.

Ear tagging should be carried out in dry, hygienic conditions with both ears and tagging equipment kept clean and tags sterilised before use. All equipment used for newborn lambs, such as stomach tubes and teats, should be sterilised before every use and cleaned and re-sterilised immediately after.

Ewes and lambs with suspected joint ill should be separated from others so they are easy to identify and can be treated and monitored. Treatment for ear, navel or joint infections involves a course of antibiotics – lasting for five to 10 days if joints are infected – and anti-inflammatory medicines to reduce the swelling and pain.

It is important to speak with your vet who will confirm penicillin is usually the most appropriate antibiotic due to tetracycline-resistance commonly being found in joint ill causing bacteria. Euthanasia may be the best option for lambs with badly affected joints and those that fail to respond to treatment.

Antibiotics

The routine preventative use of antibiotics is no longer appropriate or even permitted under the new veterinary medicine regulations. But a recent study revealed routine preventative antibiotic use was still occurring in as many as 19% of flocks to reduce the risk of infections. If this is your situation speak with your vet well ahead of lambing to ensure you have worked together to put an appropriate management plan in place.

Drying out navels is essential to minimise the risk of navel problems. Dipping or spraying with a 10% iodine solution as soon as possible after birth has been a common way to dry out the navel and help prevent infections.

Unfortunately, the maternal drive to lick the navel is strong, particularly in attentive mothers, and so the iodine may be quickly licked off. Even if not licked away, the effect of iodine is short-lived so many vets and iodine suppliers advise to apply it twice.

In recent years there have been availability issues causing the price of iodine to increase. As Chair of the Sheep Antibiotic Guardian Group, I was involved in many discussions that perhaps there would come a time when iodine became completely unavailable or priced too high for the market. This led to talks with the chemists at NoBACZ Healthcare (a spin-off company from the University of Cambridge) to see whether it might be possible to make an effective alternative.

Results from a large navel protection trial with this product can be found overleaf.

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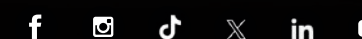
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NoBACZ Navel barrier solution

NoBACZ Healthcare is a wound protection company specialising in sustainable, quick-setting barrier dressings.

The navel product was launched in 2023. It disinfects and dries the navel sealing it with a coloured, natural resin offering a long-lasting, waterproof barrier to protect against environmental bacteria. It can also be used on ear-tagging sites and on tags themselves. It is antibiotic-free, contains a bitter agent to deter ewes from licking the area and can be applied by dipping or spraying.

During lambing 2024 a navel protection study compared NoBACZ Navel with strong iodine. It involved 6,840 lambs from 11 flocks across the UK that were born already ear-tagging at birth and routinely collecting data from birth up to weighing at eight weeks old.

The study demonstrated the product provided better protection compared with iodine, with more than 21% reduction in lamb deaths. Surviving lambs treated with the product were at least 230g heavier than those in the iodine group at eight weeks old. [More at https://nobacz.com](https://nobacz.com).



New eartags lower data capture costs

Livestock management platform iLivestock has launched a new range of sheep eartags to bring down the cost of effective farm data capture.

The eTag range has been developed in partnership with Allflex MSD. Ewen Wardman, iLivestock Chief Executive, says: "iLivestock subscribers will be able to access eTags for up to 25% less than the average market price. We are aiming to make it more affordable and accessible to benefit from farm data use and to drive production gains at a time when margins are being squeezed."

[More at www.ilivestock.co.uk](http://www.ilivestock.co.uk).



Bitesize succession guide launched

Succession planning and overcoming barriers for the next generation of farmers are tackled in a free online publication.

Rupert Alers-Hankey of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships says: "Few are aware of the huge knowledge base accessible via our library, and for those who are, finding the time to read large reports may be impractical." This bitesize guide pulls together the key thoughts of previous Nuffield Scholars and makes it easier to access.

The guide tackles different areas as eleven talking points, looking at the processes, thoughts and practicalities of succession and bringing in the next generation of farmers." [Report available at www.rase.org.uk/reports](http://www.rase.org.uk/reports).



New colostrum with yeast extract

Nettex says a formulation improvement to a long-standing lambing staple containing a fermented yeast culture can support lamb resilience.

Sarah Gallimore of Nettex adds: "Our Ultra Concentrate lamb colostrum is a high quality, easy-mix, first day colostrum providing energy and support to weak and small lambs. It now contains Celmanax to help promote feed efficiency in newborn lambs." [More at www.net-tex.co.uk](http://www.net-tex.co.uk).

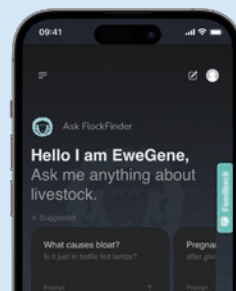


AI-powered tool helps tackle livestock diseases

FlockFinder has launched its latest tool to help livestock farmers across the UK.

Supported by Innovate UK, EweGene is a digital assistant offering guidance on disease identification, treatment and prevention.

The tool allows you to enter the symptoms and will return a list of potential matching diseases. A chat-based interface then helps narrow down this list to the most likely cause, improving the accuracy of diagnosis and treatment. [More at www.flockfinder.co.uk](http://www.flockfinder.co.uk).



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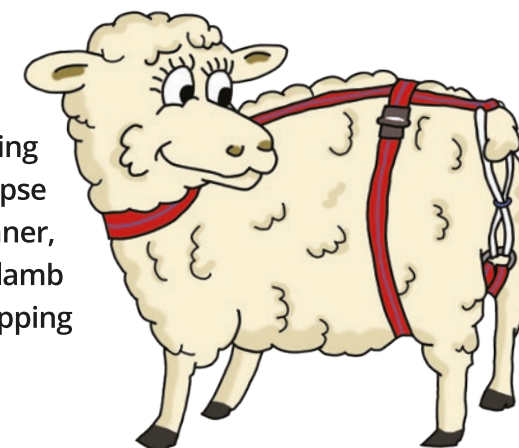
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VETERINARIAN - SOUTHLAND, NZ



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Ian Bell
HOLLBANKGATE, UK

"A good product that's well designed and easy to use and clean."

Jana Aylett
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Ensuring your grassland can cope with changing weather patterns



Soil is the foundation of productive and sustainable farming and, in the face of climate change, ensuring your grassland soils are resilient is more critical than ever.

That is the message from Katie Evans of AHDB, who says being able to assess, understand and enhance your soils will improve long-term resilience and productivity.

Mrs Evans says, "Over the last few years we have seen extremes in weather, from very wet winters to extreme temperatures and periods of drought. You need to look at how you can adapt to these changes by looking at your farming system and see where changes can be made."

Resilience

One of the key areas to look at is soil health and resilience. Soil resilience refers to the soil's ability to recover from stresses – such as compaction, drought or nutrient depletion – while continuing to support healthy plant growth. A resilient soil can:

- Withstand extreme weather conditions, such as heavy rainfall or prolonged dry periods.
- Retain nutrients and water more effectively, reducing wastage and runoff.
- Support a thriving ecosystem of microorganisms that promote soil fertility.

Mrs Evans continues: "There are things you can do to improve and maintain soil health. Test soil regularly for organic matter, pH and nutrient levels to determine whether your soil is lacking in any of these so you can take remedial action. You can incorporate organic matter such as manure, compost and crop residues to boost soil fertility.



Cover crops can help protect the soil and improve its structure and maintain permanent vegetative cover on erosion-prone slopes. It's also important to check for soil compaction and use subsoiling to alleviate it."

Protecting both your livestock and grazing platform is paramount in making sure you hit targets and are as profitable as possible. "Implementing a rotational or strip grazing system is a great way to protect soil and pasture health", she advises. "Establishing an emergency feed storage can ease the burden and stress in these situations. Don't forget to make sure livestock have adequate shelter too."

Weather

Assessing whether farm infrastructure can cope with extreme weather can help keep damage to a minimum, advises Mrs Evans: "Check buildings and access roads for flood and storm resistance. You should also check and maintain field drains and ditches regularly. Buffer strips along water courses will help prevent runoff and erosion.

"You could consider installing retention ponds for excess water storage. Establishing or expanding shelterbelts with native species can help prevent soil erosion during stormy weather."

Mrs Evans suggests carrying out a weather risk assessment. "It can be useful to map vulnerable areas on the farm, for example fields that get waterlogged or any erosion-prone slopes. You can also record historical weather patterns and their impact on farm operations and evaluate soil drainage and water retention capacity in your key fields. You can then use this information to develop an action plan for extreme weather.

This could include flood management, such as diversion ditches and emergency storage, having back up water supplies in case of drought conditions and selecting frost-resistant forage to mitigate problems caused by cold weather."

Monitoring

Whichever changes you decide to make, monitoring their effectiveness helps get most out of these strategies. "Keep records of changes in soil health, crop yields and livestock performance. This will highlight where management practices are working or where some adaptations may need to be made. Reviewing your weather proofing plan annually gives you a focus and highlight any changes over the previous 12 months," she adds.

Climate change is happening. We have seen warmer and wetter winters and drier and hotter summers in the last few years and this is set to continue. By addressing the physical, chemical and biological aspects of soil you can:

- Adapt to the challenges posed by changing weather patterns.
- Protect and enhance soil fertility for future generations.
- Improve farm profitability by reducing inputs and optimising outputs.

Mrs Evans says: "There is a wealth of information and tools on the AHDB website. AHDB will be releasing a Climate Change Adaption Report later this month identifying industry actions already being taken as well as highlighting climate change risks and opportunities affecting most farm businesses."

[More information at www.ahdb.org.uk](http://www.ahdb.org.uk).

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Effective measures for reducing the risk of livestock theft on your farm

By Martin Beck, National Rural Crime Unit

For those who have been unlucky enough to have sheep stolen, did you ask yourself if you could have done anything to prevent it?

I don't think you are alone, but the last thing you want is a young fresh-faced police officer with shiny shoes who thought a Bluefaced Leicester was a cheese, to arrive on your farm telling you about prevention.

There is a lot of well-meaning advice out there telling us how to prevent or deter livestock theft. Some from the police, some from insurance companies and some from tech companies. Much of what they say has a common thread, so unless they are just copying each other, some of it might be useful and could make a difference.

Utilise technology

Future farm field security using technology might include path and access point monitors, drones, smart animal management and tracking technology and smart remote CCTV cameras that link to our phones. This all promises to make life easier and safer but right now, although this technology is available, for most it isn't affordable or applicable to their farm geography.

There have been several studies on crime prevention, identifying techniques and then categorising these methods. This work found the best

way to prevent crime was to increase the risk taken by the offenders and to minimise their reward, while increasing the chances of being caught.

Applying this to livestock theft shouldn't require a security expert, and what could work to reduce the risk of theft happening depends on your circumstances. My guidance is to take the basic general advice out there and see where it can be applied to your circumstances and build your security from there.

Hill farmers with common grazing, for example, have a very difficult job to protect their sheep and this is why you need to consider your own individual circumstances and take from it what works for your farm setting.

Exploit weaknesses

It shouldn't be a surprise the people who are involved in sheep theft are likely looking for weakness to exploit. Criminals don't like to get stuck, neither do they like to stay around for long and risk being seen. They are likely to consider how they are going to steal before they arrive and they will have considered their exit strategy.

The more presence you can provide in your area working with others the better. This is why current advice suggests building a strong vigilant community using social media, such as a local WhatsApp group or Facebook notice boards. It takes effort to maintain these social media accounts but

some of the best farm crime warning schemes are created when people work together to spot suspicious behaviour and do something about it.

Securing field gates is another key deterrent. Locking gates is a pain in the backside but inverting hinges, padlocking gates and temporarily blocking the access points you don't use will mean the thief has to get dirty and lift sheep out and this takes time. Remember most thefts occur because the thief found a weakness to exploit. Make it harder. At the same time ensure boundaries are secure. Don't delay a fence repair.

Count sheep

Checking and counting sheep regularly sounds like another chore, as well as varying times of feeding, but this is important. Not only does it reduce the opportunities for a theft to take place, but if a theft does occur, it helps to pin down the times when the theft happened, giving police a better chance to investigate.

If you discover your sheep have been stolen tell the police promptly and with as much detail as you can, as it is likely the person taking the report doesn't know about sheep farming.

Being seen on-farm and observant at different times alongside using social media can help with the visibility creating a permanent presence. You don't need to be aggressive to holiday makers in the area (or try not to be) but having a strong presence in the area means 'stay away' to an opportunist thief.

Lambs, hogs and shearlings account for more than half of all sheep thefts. We know why lambs are stolen, so we need to accept the fact they are a hot commodity for thieves and defend them. Make access to those field difficult. There aren't many businesses who leave their assets out in a field with minimal security and go home for the night. This makes sheep farming a unique business.

Everyone knows how easy it is to cut an ear tag off. Forensic DNA wool marking is a good deterrent. I've seen some sheep returned to their keepers promptly after good social media circulation from the unusual wool markings the farmer had put on them. Wool marks aren't permanent, but if your sheep are sprayed in bright green letter of your initials for example, they do become much easier for the police and the public to spot.



Padlocks and inverting hinges on field gates can help deter thieves.

Unique marks can help identify your sheep from others.



Clear markings

Anything you can do to make your sheep more identifiable increases the risks the thief must take. Some people resort to more permanent markings including ear tattoos, horn markings and bolus EIDs, this again is a matter for your circumstances and to consider.

Farmers are the most inventive and resourceful problem solvers that I know of and, using those skills, we need to find good ways to apply

crime prevention advice. Make it as hard as possible for your stock to be stolen and as easy as possible to identify any stock in case of a theft.

While I cannot guarantee a police officer won't be turning up at your farm thinking a Bluefaced Leicester is a cheese, not all are the same and most genuinely want to help. Work together and pass any information about the people involved in stealing sheep and how they operate to the police.

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Best practice for vaccine handling, storage and technique

By Nicola Noble, NSA

The health of an adult ewe is critical to maintaining her production and fertility, both now and in the future.

One of NSA's priorities has always been sheep health and welfare, and to emphasise the importance of a healthy flock to help increase public perception, reduce labour requirements, increase profits and reduce medicine use – contributing to a more sustainable industry.

By adopting a vaccination strategy, alongside an integrated approach to disease prevention, you can help to protect the health of your flock.

NSA welcomes flock health planning as an essential on-farm method for improved animal health and welfare and would encourage all members to actively engage in communication with vets and advisers as a positive step towards a more sustainable sheep sector. Vaccination should always be used as part of an integrated approach to disease prevention including colostrum management, hygiene and biosecurity.

Technique

Technique is critical when using vaccines to get the best from the product, reduce the risk of adverse reactions and improve operator safety. Ensure you always:

- Store the vaccine correctly. Most vaccines need to be stored in a working fridge at 2-8°C, but check the product datasheet.
- Only vaccinate healthy sheep.
- Pick a dry day, ensuring sheep are clean and wool is dry.
- Shake the bottle before use.
- Take care when handling and administering the product.
- Check the licence before using other treatments. If in doubt, do not give two different products at the same time.

When it comes to vaccinating your sheep, best practices is as follows:

- If using a multi-dose syringe, ensure it is clean prior to use.
- Remove the cap from the vaccine bottle and place the rubber bung of the bottle firmly onto the broaching spike.
- Calibrate and prime the syringe to the correct dose for the route of injection, species and animal weight.
- Place a new, sterile needle suitable for the injection site onto the syringe.



Vaccines help protect your flock when used correctly.

- To change the vaccine bottle, remove the empty bottle from the spike, taking care to avoid contamination of the spike with your hands or from the environment, and place the next bottle onto the spike.
- If you are concerned the spike may have been contaminated you can wipe with an alcohol impregnated wipe before placing on the next bottle.
- Following use, the multi-dose syringe should be cleaned on the same day. Flush the system with warm soapy water by operating the gun when immersed to ensure any remaining vaccine is removed. Cold water sterilising tablets can be used but the device will need to be immersed, flushed through and left to soak for 15 minutes. Then flush through with cooled boiled water.
- Lubricate the plunger O-ring with a couple of drops of vegetable oil after cleaning or if the device becomes sluggish during use.
- Following cleaning, store in a sealed bag (such as a zip-lock freezer bag) to reduce contamination during storage. The bag can be left open in a clean environment while the syringe dries, prior to sealing and storing.
- If you have any concerns about the cleanliness or function prior to vaccination you should not use it.

In the event of limited stock of a particular vaccine, speak to your vet about alternatives or use resources which are available from the vaccine manufacturer.

NSA promotes the importance of the health of the national flock and would encourage members to look at strategies to implement preventative measures to ensure a healthy, productive flock leading to a profitable business.

Thanks to MSD Animal Health for the resources that contributed to this piece.

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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.



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

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



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.

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