

Following the flock

We visit Devon, Gloucestershire and Hampshire to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Peter Delbridge

NSA Chairman, Devon

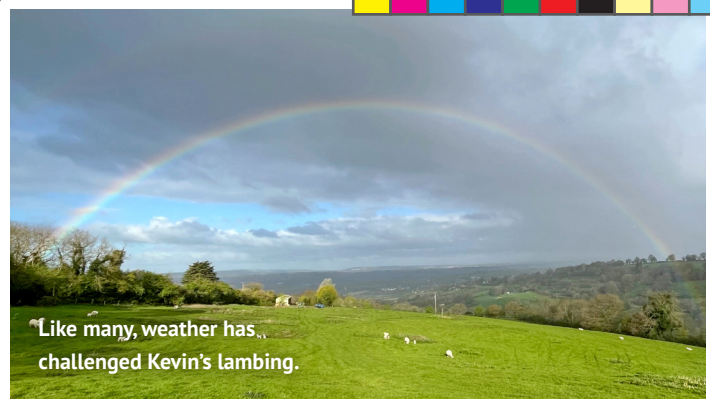
In mid-May we still had a few late Exlana ewes to lamb, while the Exmoor Horns and ever dwindling number of North Country Mules had finished a week earlier.

I didn't stick to my traditional start day for lambing between Lady Day (25th March) and 1st April. How fortunate that turned out to be. We only had to endure a week of mud and rain before the dry weather arrived mid-April and consequently, we have had a decent lambing despite one day bringing rain, sleet and a strong, cold North East wind.

While nobody I've spoken to has had an easy lambing, and some have had an absolute nightmare with Schmallenberg, at least the finished trade for last season's hogs and new season lambs reached dizzy heights. Time will tell if the supply of finished lambs in the autumn will allow processors to blend out a low enough average to compensate for that hot spring trade.

Things I have learnt this lambing. My crooks for catching ewes and lambs need to be an inch longer each year. And wellies, while easy to put on/take off, are no match for a good pair of leather boots, keeping my feet dry, warm and supported.

Now there's time to recover before summer work by attending a show or an NSA event. Hopefully I'll see you there.



Kevin Harrison

NSA Policy & Technical Committee Chair, Gloucestershire

Did you hear the one about the king of the indoor lambing system who decided to start outdoor lambing at the age of 55?

That's me! And I certainly have a few more scars from my journey as a result. I think sometimes it's easier not to look back too much when things beyond our control are challenging. It's best to embrace the positives. But the figures will tell the true story.

I lambed the remainder of our Mules indoors in early March. They came in at Christmas, were shorn and fed right through to two weeks after lambing. The shed seemed a very quiet place compared to what it used to be with 800 sheep in it.

The fact I was lambing the Mules in March and the poor weather reduced my time to focus on getting the Exlanas into as many groups as I wanted probably put me on the back foot come April. A hundred maiden yearlings were always going to be challenging when you're not hardened to the whole outdoor lambing experience and they were certainly the group with the most issues. The four toothed held their nerve and kept me sane, but ravens and foxes made sure I had something to worry about. But there were massive savings on feed and labour costs.

All lambs have had their first clostridial vaccine and nematodirus treatment where required. Creep feeders are out with the Suffolk Mules and there is grass in front of the Exlanas.

I have learnt many lessons for next year to aid improvement and I have a long way to go to climb the ranks of outdoor lambing royalty, but I haven't been put off and I still have 13 years until I am allowed to retire. The journey continues.



Sophie Wernham

NSA South East Region Committee Member, Hampshire

With 1,800 North Country Mules lambing outside I think we have been fortunate with the weather and I'm feeling relieved to see the end of lambing 2024.

The rain stopped a couple of days before the first lambs hit the floor, and it's hardly rained since. Scanning was slightly down for us this year with an average of 182%, although I was glad to not see as many triplets expected than previous years. With the help of a good team, overall lambing has gone well and we've successfully fostered most lambs onto single ewes, resulting in only 15 orphans in the shed!

May has been busy gathering all ewes and lambs to put on fly cover and the groups mobbed to make checking easier and less time consuming. For the first time the wet, miserable winter left us with a few hogs in May, with the last few finished late May/early June.

A recent visit on the farm from our local YFC was a brilliant opportunity to show and educate the next generation about what we do.

