

# Following the flock

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

## Susie Parish

NSA South East Region Chair, Hampshire

The shearing season began early this year, with many long, hot days spent on the board.



This summer I travelled to compete in sheep shearing and wool handling competitions at many of the county shows. It's always nice to catch up with friends, as well as enjoying the competitions. A highlight was pulling on the England shirt for the first time, representing the country in a blade shearing development test match against Wales.

Alongside the shearing and shows, I've also had the company of three of my dog Wyn's sheepdog pups. They've been with me all summer, and their energy and enthusiasm has brought plenty of life and laughter to my summer.

It's been rewarding watching them begin to understand their job, tentatively circling the flock, finding balance and growing in confidence. Of course, there have been plenty of chaotic moments too, but that's part of the process. One boy pup has gone to his new home in Devon, so I've just got the two girls now.

Despite the dry conditions and lack of rainfall, the sheep have really thrived. The dry weather helped keep parasite levels low and resulted in strong, healthy lambs with good growth. But, the lack of grass means we haven't made any hay this year. We'll be relying entirely on last season's hay to get us through the winter, so careful planning and management will be key.



Susie represented England in blade shearing against Wales.



Edward has vaccinated his high value stock against bluetongue to reduce the risk.

## Edward Adamson

NSA Northern Ireland Chair, County Antrim



It's that time of year again when we must decide whether to hold on to the lambs and draw them as they finish, or sell them as stores.

Here in Northern Ireland, we have had better grass but there remains uncertainty to what's ahead for the winter. I expect we will move a proportion of store lambs off and save grass to help get the ewes through with more feed on the ground.

It's amazing how supply and demand has changed with demand outstripping supply this year. It is time those of us doing the hard graft of lambing do get some reward, even though this spring was a lot easier than the last.

As you read this, breeders will know if we have managed to avoid bluetongue virus but, as I write, it's coming to ideal temperatures to allow the disease to spread. My son and I have decided to vaccinate the higher value stock. I know a lot who think it is too expensive but it's not much per head if it helps control the virus. Friends in the Netherlands tell me the big difference was made when breeders started to vaccinate cattle as well as sheep, slowing the spread from animal to animal.

Commercial ewes are now in the run up to tugging and being prepped to optimise embryo fertilisation and retention. Then the anxious wait to find out if we succeeded.

Parasites are a keen area of interest for Kevin.

## Kevin Harrison

Chair of NSA UK Policy and Technical Committee, Gloucestershire



Defra has a massive job to do to try to build trust between it and farmers again, just when we seemed to be getting somewhere.

Having spent the last couple of years changing my sheep system to be more sustainable it was irritating to have the rug pulled from under my feet with the stopping of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) just as we were about to put an application in.

I've put the land earmarked for SFI into an early crop of stubble turnips to help the ram lambs finish quicker. They came on a treat in June but then it forgot to rain. I won't dwell on the drought but it was a challenge to see the turnips being an all you can eat buffet for caterpillars and then drying up like autumn leaves. At least it wasn't an expensive herbal ley. Amazingly, now we have had plenty of rain, they are recovering well and should be of some use.

I write this sat at the airport waiting to fly to Poland for my second SPARC meeting, a European initiative promoting sustainable parasite control in grazing ruminants. A mixing pot of academics, practitioners and ambassadors exchanging knowledge on parasite control and understanding.

What I have learnt in the last few years as Chair of the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep group is the more you learn about parasites the more challenging they become. But if you stay focused and get reputable advice from respected sources you can navigate your way through it.