

# British Heritage Sheep - New Tastes from Old Traditions

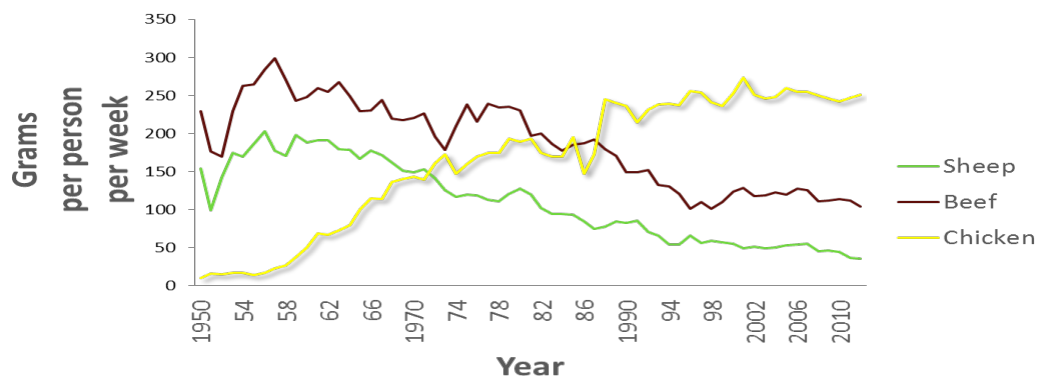
A meeting was held at the NSA Malvern on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2016, at which a proposal by the NSA to develop a strategy for adding value to sheep supply chains, enhancing landscapes and the environment was discussed. Some 35 people attended from various strands of the sheep sector.

It should be noted that there was a high level of agreement with the proposal from those at the meeting, as well as some useful comments on more detailed items.

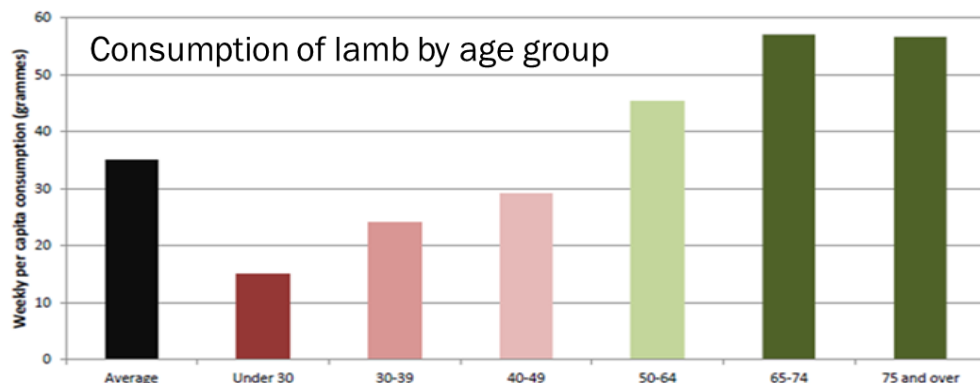
This paper is a resume of the proposal as it stands.

## THE PROBLEM

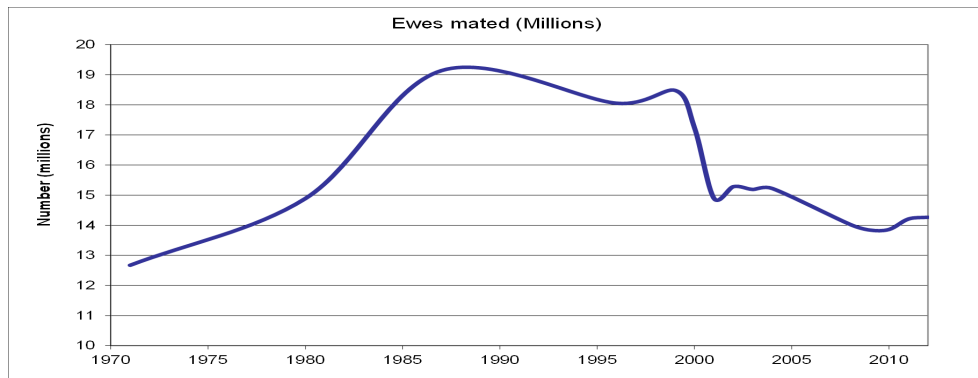
1. **The background to the modern UK sheep industry** can be characterised as:
  - UK is a small country with large sheep population
  - Production highly lamb-meat market focussed
  - High dependence on grass and free range
  - High involvement with agri-environment schemes and high reliance on SFP for viability
  - 3rd largest exporter globally
  - 6th largest producer
  - 40% production export driven and 60% home market
2. **Consumption of sheep meat** is in long-term decline, especially when compared to poultry consumption:



3. **The demographic of lamb consumption** is dominated by older people.



4. **The number of breeding ewes** has levelled out after the impact of previous headage payments has gone, at around 16 million.

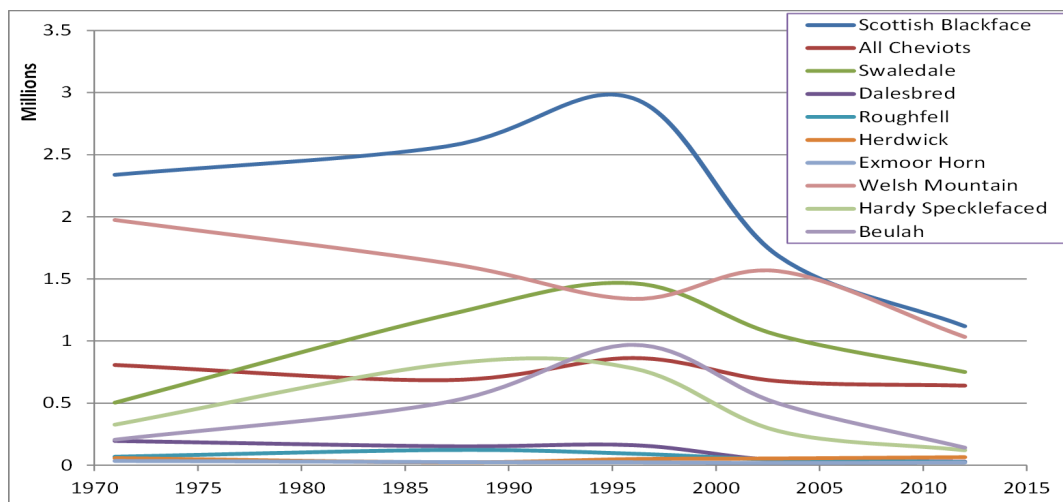


5. **The structure of the UK sheep industry** has changed over the past 40 years from a predominantly traditional stratified system, where different breeds were kept at different altitudes and interbred to produce the final finished lamb in the lowlands, towards a non-stratified one, where a few 'general-purpose' breeds are scattered in several ecological and altitude zones to directly produce finished lambs.

The percentage of sheep numbers split between the two structures has changed over the last 45 years:

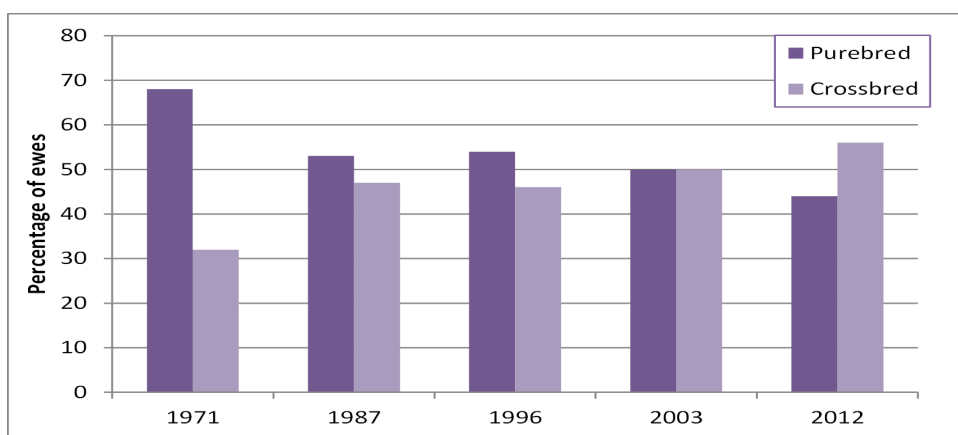
1971	1987	1996	2003	2012	
86	78	77	71	56	Stratified system
14	22	23	29	44	Non-stratified system

6. **Hill breed populations have declined quite dramatically** over the past 40 years, as have other traditional UK Heritage breeds.



	Numbers in 000s	1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
Border Leicester		12	28	13	5	4
Romney Marsh		294	217	159	165	201
Devon Closewool		127	51	6	7	4
Devon and Cornwall Longwool		290	28	4	2	2
Whitefaced Dartmoor		39	1	6	5	4
Greyfaced Dartmoor		33	4	3	4	4
Clun Forest		401	124	44	12	10
Dorset Horn		59	124	17	12	11
Kerryhill		209	47	2	13	10
Llanwenog		20	3	10	6	7
Total		1,492	646	273	247	273

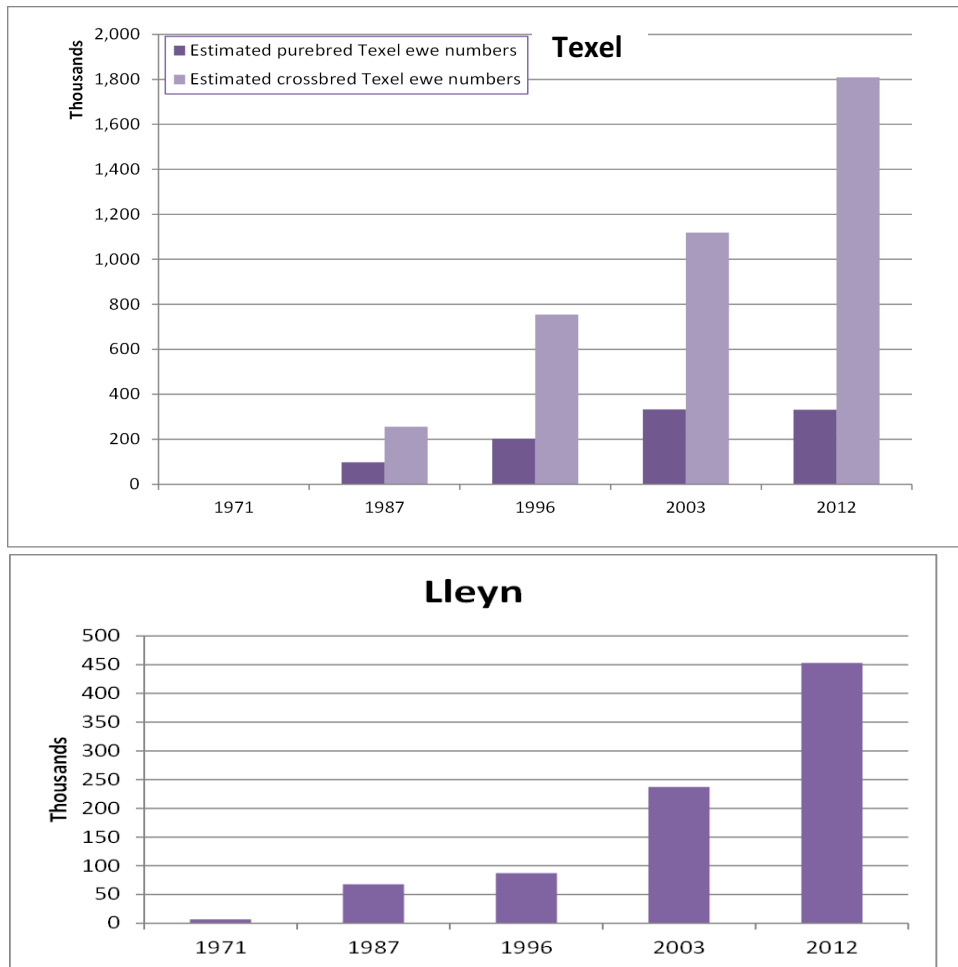
7. Whilst the pure-bred numbers have been in general decline, several cross-breeds have been on the rise.



Cross Breed numbers ('000)

	1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
North Country Mule	311	3,233	3,809	1,915	2,094
Welsh Mule		370	631	738	330
Scots Mule		502	263	610	231
Greyface	214	332	156	212	90
Welsh Halfbred (HB)	304	410	250	130	28
Scottish Halfbred	590	346	162	100	19
Masham	406	249	162	56	32
Suffolk x Mule/HB type	550	603	495	590	622
Texel x Mule/HB type	0	32	220	307	862
Suffolk x Hill	154	182	115	81	154
Texel x Hill	0	25	28	92	76
Total	2,529	6,284	6,291	4,831	4,538

8. A few breeds have seen dramatic increases in numbers, including the Texel and Lleyn:



9. **New breeds and composites are still appearing.** This is a continuation of breeding innovation that has occurred for centuries. However, there is some concern in the industry about recent such developments, especially if the ownership of these genetics is held by breeding companies with contacts, skills, and finance, to establish marketing relationships with national supply chains and/or supermarkets. Experience of such developments in other livestock sectors is that it can have sudden and far reaching effects on reducing genetic variety.

10. **The Threats**

These changes have been interpreted by many as more “efficient” sheep production. However, there are dangers, two of which are particularly important.

a. **The threat to the genetic viability of our native sheep breeds**

The UK has over 60 native breeds of sheep, the highest in the world. The decline in the commercial use of traditional heritage breeds of sheep threatens the priceless genepool which they give us. Who knows what genetic traits will be needed in future, which could disappear as populations of breeds shrink to genetically non-viable levels? No sheep breed can rest on its laurels and resist moving with the times, but all breeds carry valuable traits which need recognition. The future of heritage sheep breeds will be more secure if they succeed in the marketplace. With the consumption in sheep meat having fallen so dramatically in 50 years, NSA believes that the approach outlined in this proposal could help

increase sheep meat consumption through a wider range and type of outlets, with a fresh offering that links sheep meat, landscape and culture, and builds further on the success that has been experienced by recently expanding breeds and mainstream markets.

b. **The threat to the landscape and communities of the uplands.**

The decline of stratification has reflected a decline in traditional sheep farming systems, which have developed and maintained many landscapes over hundreds of years. The intensification and 'increased efficiency' of farming enterprises such as pigs, poultry and dairy have changed these sectors beyond recognition. Sheep farming, particularly in the uplands, remains the final bastion of traditional farming systems in the UK, based largely on family farms. However, unlike other farming sectors which are less landscape-based, the decline of traditional sheep farming has more far-reaching impacts both on the cherished landscape of the uplands and other pastoral areas, and on the communities which still largely rely on traditional sheep farming for their survival.

**It is these threats which the NSA believes need addressing.**

# THE PROPOSAL

## PROMOTING HERITAGE SHEEP BREEDS & TRADITIONAL FARMING SYSTEMS

A strategic proposal for adding value to sheep supply chains, enhancing landscapes and the environment.

### British Heritage Sheep - New Tastes from Old Traditions

#### 1. The Sheep Meat Mono-Product

Industry-scale promotional and marketing efforts currently concentrate largely on just one product, Standard Lamb. There may be regional differences, such as Welsh, Scotch and English, but that is where the differentiation stops. Meanwhile, sheep production has a gloriously diverse heritage. This can be illustrated by using ABC:

- A. **Age** – lamb, hogget, mutton
- B. **UK Heritage Breed** – approx. 60 to choose from
- C. **British Countryside/Landscape** – e.g. Lake District, Scottish Highlands, Yorkshire Dales, South Wales Salt Marshes, etc.

Between them, these points of differentiation could offer a huge consumer choice and interest in sheep meat.

The current sheep meat market could be compared to the wine market of the 1950s and 1960s. At that time there were only a small handful of widely available wines. This has now exploded into thousands. The same argument could be used for cheese, as the UK now produces more varieties than France, and beer, where real ale choices are enough to satisfy the most ardent CAMRA member.

With increased interest in the story behind our food, the time seems right to offer the consumer more choice in sheep meat.

#### 2. Why should we more actively support the diversity of sheep products?

If the diversity of sheep meat (as well as wool and skins) was commercialised, it could lead to a number of important benefits.

- **Enhance farm incomes**, particularly in upland areas and practical support for existing farmer/retailers;
- **Support & encourage local supply chains**, and other local businesses, keeping more wealth within the local community;
- **Help ensure the financial and genetic viability of our traditional UK heritage breeds**;
- **Help maintain traditional farming systems** which have developed in harmony with the environment, and created our iconic British landscapes.

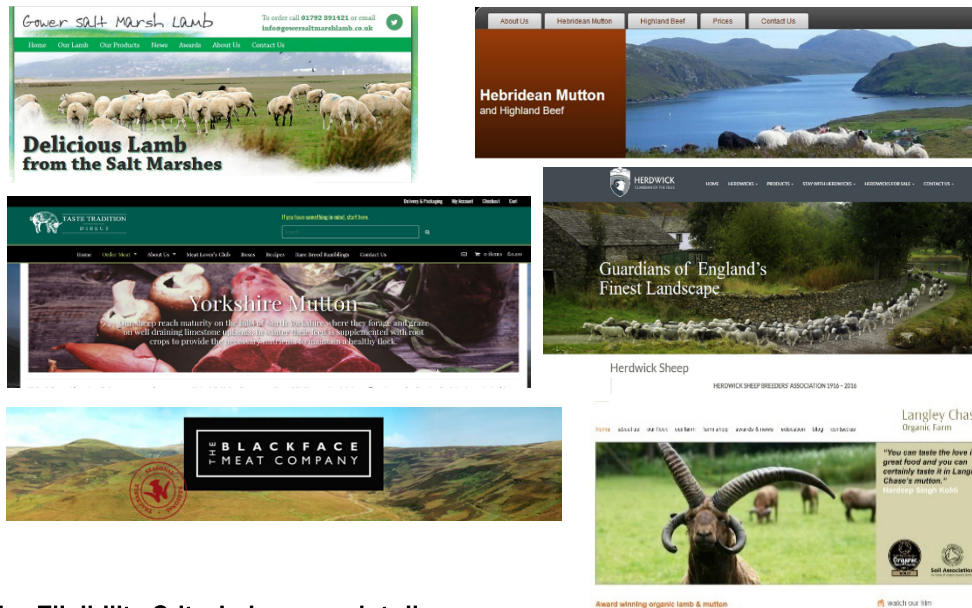
#### 3. The Proposal – ‘British Heritage Sheep - New Tastes from Old Traditions’

The sector should:

- a. **Develop a marketing system** to promote the diversity (ABC - Age, Breed, Countryside) of sheep products.
- b. **Register interested producers, processors, retailers and caterers** who fulfil the criteria.
- c. **Initiate an on-line marketplace** along the supply chain, assisting the meeting of buyers and sellers
- d. **Clearly brand sheep products**, (meat, wool and skins) sold under the scheme

- e. **Orchestrate public education and publicity to consumers** through PR about our sheep meat heritage and choice.

4. **Marketing the ABC of diverse sheep meat can be done, and is being, for example:**



5. **The Eligibility Criteria in more detail**

- a. **Ages of sheep** – lamb, hogget and mutton. (lamb= under 1 year; hogget = 1-2 years; mutton = 2 years +) Lamb only involved if at least two other categories are included.
- b. **Traditional UK Sheep Breeds** – heritage breeds developed for specific UK conditions.  
Imported and recently naturalised breeds not to be included.
- c. **Countryside/Landscapes** – specific geographical features, such as Lake District, South Downs, South Wales Salt Marshes, etc.. NOT counties or regions, with differing types of landscapes. Farm-direct retailers would be eligible, as the sheep products are produced in a specified landscape.

**How many eligibility criteria are required?**

Any participating products must include at least 2 categories above (or all 3 in the case of lamb).

**Possible Additional Criteria**

- d. **Animal Diet** – e.g. grass/forage fed. This may interfere with other schemes (e.g. Pasture Fed)
- e. **Other animal production systems** – Organic, HNV (High Nature Value) farming, etc. As above
- f. **Food Miles**, How to quantify?
- g. **Environmental sustainability**  
Would require membership of recognised environmental scheme(s), if it was to be included as a criterion.
- h. **Meat quality**  
Should questions such as hanging of meat, butchery quality, etc. be included to ensure public enjoyment of the meats?

**6. Who Would be Eligible to Join the Scheme?**

- a. **Farmers**
- b. **Processors**
- c. **Wholesalers**
- d. **Retailers** - producer/retailers, butchers, food shops
- e. **Caterers** - pubs, restaurants, catering companies

**7. How Would Products be described under the Scheme?**

**Claims allowed under the scheme would be for example:**

“Shropshire breed hogget from the Shropshire Hills AONB” or “Blackface breed mutton from the Cheviot Hills” (both descriptions include all three ABC criteria)

**Simply “Derbyshire Lamb” for example, would not be eligible.**

**8. Is a new quality inspection and verification scheme needed for involvement with this initiative?**

Probably not, if legally-binding written undertaking made by participants. Ultimate adjudicator is local Trading Standards Departments.

**9. Is a logo needed to show affiliation to the scheme?**

Yes

**10. Who would ‘own’ the initiative?**

The NSA is happy to lead the process initially, but very much sees this as an industry-led and owned initiative. Before the end of the second stage of the feasibility study, a steering committee of sector organisations which funded the feasibility study will be needed to take it forward.

**11. Elements of Scheme**

- a. **Set scheme standards**
- b. **Create a web-based marketplace** for approved products along the supply chain
- c. **Promotion** - Education and information along supply chain, particularly to consumers. PR, social media. Promotion could be done by professional PR companies and/or participating organisations with consumer-facing communication, especially social media.

**12. Financial Sustainability**

Essential to raise income through the scheme

- a. **Via website** - Small registration fee for participants in the supply chain, and charges for clicks to source supplies.
- b. **Industry bodies** would probably need to contribute funding for the scheme for a few years, in cash or kind.
- c. **Grants**, both public bodies and commercial companies with a British image could be approached.
- d. **Other revenue sources** would be needed. Needs investigation.



## THE NEXT STEPS

At the end of the Malvern meeting a number of questions were posed to the attendees. Their virtually unanimous responses were as follows:

**1. Is such a strategy required for non-standard lamb and other sheep products?**

Response: Yes

**2. If yes, should there be a feasibility study to ascertain in detail how it could be established and implemented?**

Response: Yes

**3. Can the feasibility study be funded by participating organisations?**

Response: If feasibility study can be broken down into say three stages, then the preliminary and first new stages could be funded by the industry, with the later steps potentially being funded by outside bodies.

## Feasibility Study Stages

**1. Preliminary stage (Stage 1)**

Some considerable work has already been completed on the proposal, as contained in this report, and this is being included in the overall study.

**2. Consultation Stage (Stage 2)**

- a. Consult with stakeholders on various aspects of the proposal
- b. Literature review of other similar marketing schemes worldwide and individuals who already operate by identifying ABC (Age, Breed, Countryside/landscape)
- c. Carry out more detailed costings
- d. Interim report and feedback to stakeholders

**3. Final Stage 3 (dependant on, and influenced by stage 2 above)**

- a. Analysis of potential participants in the supply chain
- b. Investigate technical aspects of web-based operations
- c. Propose legal nature of organisation – limited company/non-profit/charity, etc.
- d. Develop plans for financial sustainability
- e. SWOT analysis
- f. Full set of financial projections
- g. Estimate of benefits to farmers and general rural economies
- h. Quantitative consumer analysis of attitudes to proposed project
- i. Identify potential funders for final project
- j. Final report – is the proposal feasible?

### Specialist inputs - Legal advice

In determining the legal entity involved in the eventual running of the project, it will be necessary to take legal advice.

## CURRENT SITUATION (September 2017)

The industry was asked to contribute to stages 1 and 2 of the study. Contributions ranged from £500 for large bodies, to £100 for smallest organisations. To date, pledges have been received from 16 organisations.

An application was made to the Prince's Countryside Fund for the balance of funding, which has been granted. This means that the work on phases 2 and 3 of the feasibility study is going ahead. Phase 2 is the main consultative phase, and all contributors to the work, and others, will soon be contacted for their views.

## Other Support

The proposal has received support from a range of other organisations and prominent media outlets, and a meeting has been arranged with DEFRA.

Phil Stocker and Bob Kennard  
NSA  
September 2017