

SPRING 2022

RUMINANT NEWS

AT THE HEART OF THE BEEF & LAMB INDUSTRY

**New Nitrogen Fertiliser
Calculator tool**

**We Eat Balanced
campaign proves a hit**

A photograph of three brown cattle in a grassy field. One large cow is in the foreground, looking towards the camera. Two smaller calves are behind it, one slightly to the left and one slightly to the right. The background shows a hilly landscape under a clear sky.

**FORWARD PLANNING
FOR A FOCUSED FUTURE**

Helping you to navigate the next few months and plan ahead

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WELCOME

Will Jackson,
Divisional Engagement Director



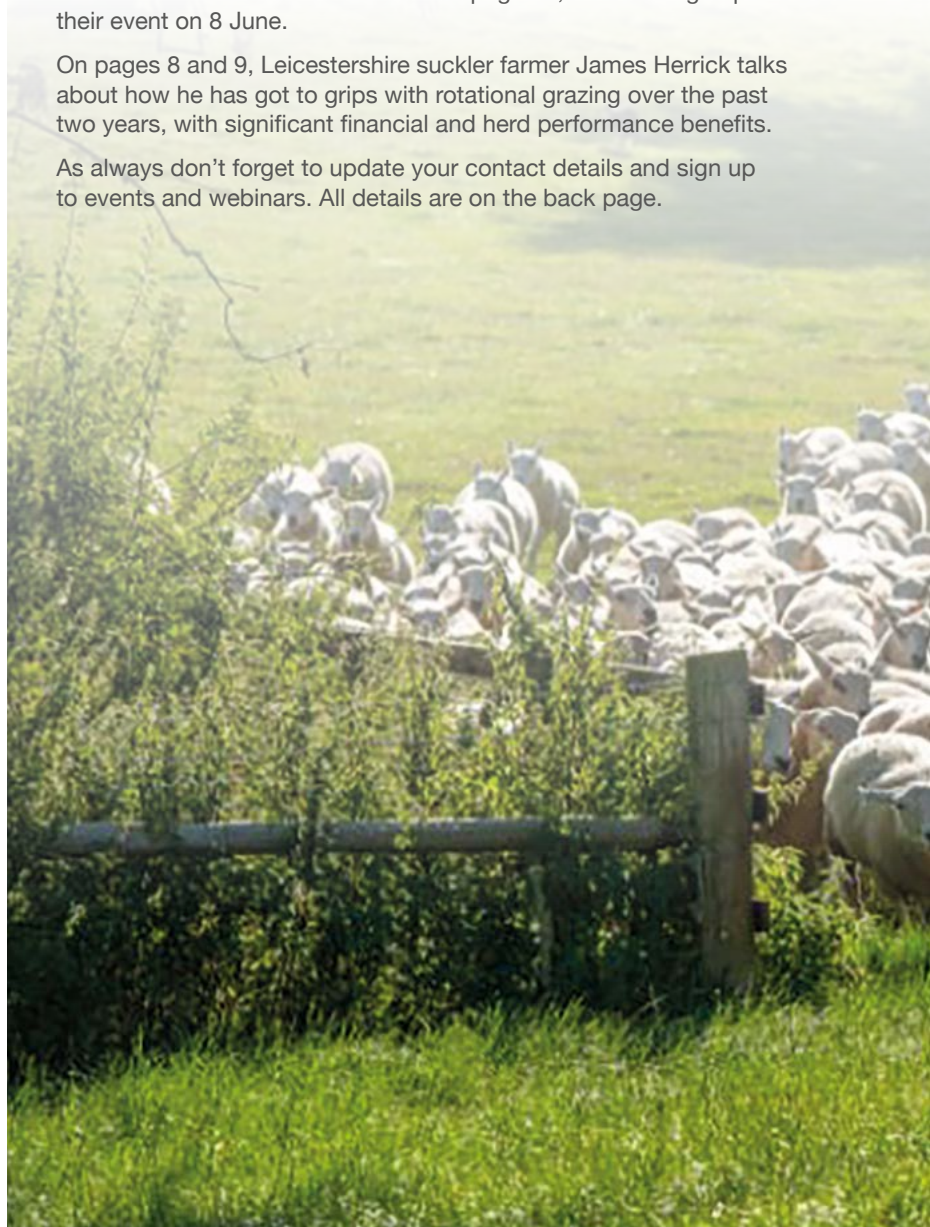
After two years of not being able to get out as much to our overseas markets, our exports team are back out in action and championing our beef and lamb abroad. You can find out more from our Head of Asia Pacific, Jonathan Eckley, on pages 10 and 11 about the year where exports for beef and lamb added nearly £900 million to the sectors.

Our Strategic and Monitor farms have been busy, with some well attended events in January and February. You can find out what's coming up on the back page. On pages 16 and 17 you can read how one of our first Strategic Farmers, Ian Norbury, is now closer to his target of making a £30,000 wage from suckler cows.

We also hear from one of our new Monitor Farms about how they are looking to reduce labour and medicine costs through Targeted Selective Treatment. Find out more on page 18, and also sign up to their event on 8 June.

On pages 8 and 9, Leicestershire suckler farmer James Herrick talks about how he has got to grips with rotational grazing over the past two years, with significant financial and herd performance benefits.

As always don't forget to update your contact details and sign up to events and webinars. All details are on the back page.



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AHDB is a statutory levy board, funded by farmers, growers and others in the supply chain. We equip the industry with easy to use, practical know-how which they can apply straight away to make better decisions and improve their performance. For further information, please visit ahdb.org.uk

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FORWARD PLANNING FOR A FOCUSED FUTURE

The start of the year has seen increases in prices across many areas, which has been exacerbated by the impact of the war in Ukraine. At AHDB we are doing everything we can to help you navigate through the next few months and plan ahead for the future. While there are challenges for our sector, there are opportunities too.

With Basic Payments decreasing over the next few years, there is an opportunity to look at your business and work out ways to change and adapt, which will help to remain profitable. With new initiatives coming in, like the Sustainable Farming Incentive, there are ways to help the environment while helping your finances. It can be complicated and confusing to work out where you should concentrate, what would have the biggest impact for you and what will be a worthwhile investment.

With this in mind we have done the calculations for you. You can use these to model what would work for your farm business and where it's worth concentrating your effort. More details can be found on page 6.

With fertiliser prices remaining high, there are decisions to be made about whether to reduce nitrogen fertiliser applications, or even look for alternative options.

We've had many conversations with you about this and as a result we've created a Nitrogen Fertiliser calculator. It accounts for fertiliser and feed prices to calculate the cost benefit of applying nitrogen to grassland. You can find out more on page 7.

We are still seeing strong demand for our product, and our recent We Eat Balanced campaign had good results for engagement. Ninety per cent of consumers said the TV advert communicated that red meat and dairy can be part of a balanced diet. Consumers also said the likelihood of them buying red meat or dairy had risen after being exposed to the £3.5 million campaign – which ran throughout January and February. We will continue to support the industry and champion the positive role that red meat and dairy from Britain can play as part of a healthy and sustainable diet.

You are helping us forward plan too. We're now going through all of your Shape the Future feedback on the priorities for beef and lamb in the future. Our Sector Council will work through the results and use them to shape our strategy for the next five years to make sure we deliver what is important to the industry. I'd like to thank all of you who have taken the time to contribute to this important work.



Defending the reputation of our industry

Eating more sustainably has become increasingly important to consumers, and the environmental impact of food is being analysed extensively. AHDB's marketing team promote the benefits of a well-balanced diet to consumers, whilst our media and PR team are proactive in tackling misinformation in the media. Find out how the two teams work to bring balance to the conversation.

We Eat Balanced campaign proves a hit with young consumers

A staggering 90% of consumers said AHDB's We Eat Balanced TV advert communicated that meat and dairy can be part of a balanced diet. And two different consumer age groups said the likelihood of them buying meat or dairy had risen after being exposed to the £3.5 million campaign, which ran throughout January and February.

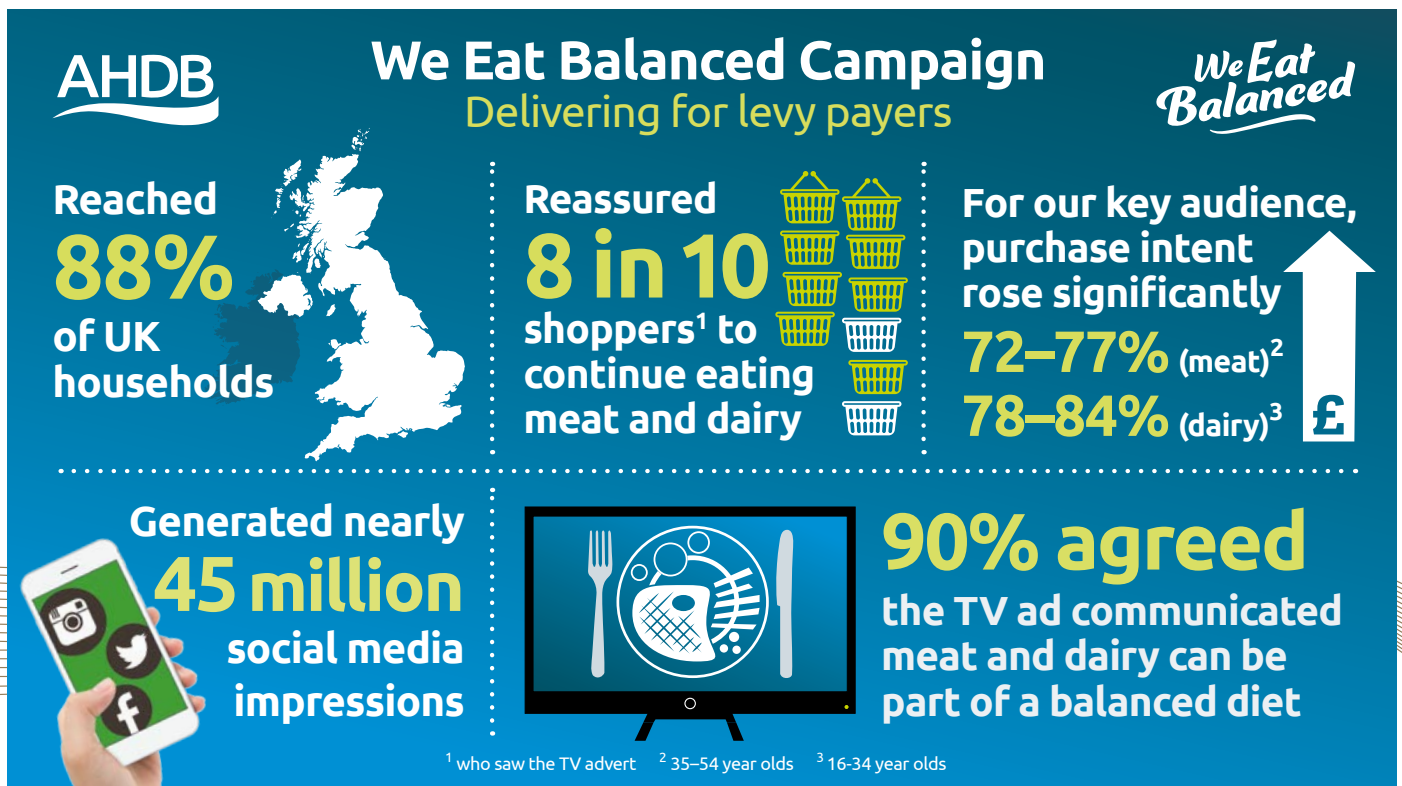
We Eat Balanced, which is in its second year, played out on TV screens, social media and in print. It was seen by nearly 24 million UK households – delivering important messages around health, sustainability and Britain's world-class food and farming standards.

The TV advert, featuring nine-year-old Nancy and her grandfather, proved a hit with consumers, particularly young adults – a demographic which has historically been harder to reach.

AHDB Director of Marketing Liam Byrne said, "The campaign has played an important part in helping counteract the sensationalist headlines by helping to position the positive role that red meat and dairy from Britain can play as part of a healthy and sustainable diet.

"It's also great to see how well the campaign has landed with young people, who are typically very engaged in issues of ethics, health and the environment.

"Most of us want to do the right thing, by making small positive changes to improve our health and the health of the planet. By understanding that when you choose red meat and dairy from Britain you are choosing products with some of the lowest carbon footprints and highest welfare standards in the world. This is something we can all do, easily."



The campaign focused on three key messages: red meat and dairy as a source of Vitamin B12, Britain's world-class production standards, and that red meat and dairy from Britain is among the most sustainable in the world.

Following the campaign, consumer perceptions that meat and dairy from Britain is produced sustainably grew significantly – up five and eight percentage points to 41% and 51% respectively.

We Eat Balanced also drove significant uplifts in attitudes around health, with the number of consumers seeing meat and dairy as a source of vitamin B12 rising five and four percentage points to 30% and 34% respectively.

The campaign, which was aimed at people who were looking to reduce the amount of meat and dairy they consumed, also generated nearly 45 million impressions across social media and video-on-demand.



Five ways AHDB challenges misinformation

Fact sharing

Using our in-house creative and social media experts, we develop infographics to share the facts about the real environmental impact of British Agriculture. These facts are shared with stakeholders across the industry and they form the base of AHDB's We Eat Balanced campaign.

Education

AHDB's education team works with other industry partners such as LEAF and the British Nutrition Foundation on education programmes such as Food – a Fact of Life and the Countryside Classroom. These programmes provide resources for educators of all age groups, to help improve children's understanding of food and farming.

Formal complaints

Broadcast and online advertising, including on social media, must adhere to the Advertising Standards Authority codes. AHDB makes formal complaints on behalf of levy payers when it believes codes have been violated.

Recent complaints include Oatly, Meatless Farm, Quorn and Greenpeace. While they can have positive outcomes, such as the banning of adverts from Quorn, Oatly and Meatless Farm, sometimes the complaints are not upheld.

Promoting balanced reporting

Every day AHDB's press office reviews media reports about agriculture and, where it is felt appropriate, they contact journalists and publications to share facts including our own evidence-based research to encourage balanced reporting. This has most recently been done with the BBC and The Times. While many publications are responsive to our expertise and make changes to articles, we sometimes come across journalists who choose not to respond or engage.

Insight and evidence

As an evidence-based organisation, AHDB utilises its expertise to respond to new reports, studies or public bodies to ensure a balanced and rounded picture is given of the environmental impact of British agriculture. A recent example is when our CEO Tim Rycroft wrote a letter to Oxfordshire County Council which had proposed making all public sector meals plant-based and vegan, referencing the global impact of livestock on the environment. The council did not take into account the fact emissions are far lower in the UK. By responding to reports, it allows the opportunity for a counter voice in the press to balance the conversation.

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How the Sustainable Farming Incentive will work for you

Are you interested in joining the Sustainable Farming Incentive, but can't work out what would benefit your farm business most? Here's a snapshot from our Horizon report.

Change is happening at a rapid pace, and with the removal of Direct Payments and the phasing in of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), farm businesses will need to change and adapt.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), part of ELMS, aims to reward farmers for carrying out actions that benefit the environment. The SFI pilot began towards the end of 2021 and has eight standards which farmers could apply on their farms. The wider rollout of the SFI is due to begin in summer 2022.

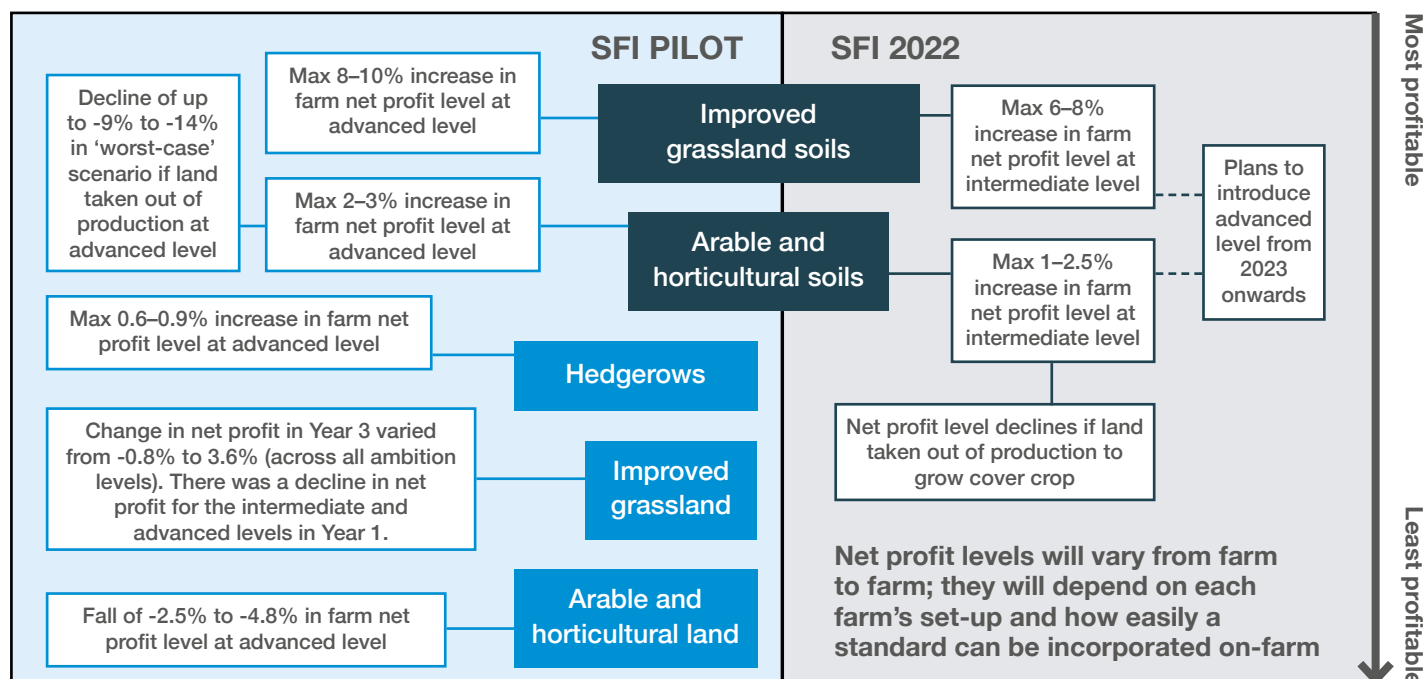
AHDB, alongside Harper Adams University, has looked at farmer attitudes and intentions to both the pilot SFI scheme and the 2022 roll out, as well as modelling the likely impact on net profits of participating in the scheme.

Our Horizon report, 'Assessing the impact of the Sustainable Farming Incentive on farm businesses', shows that at the current payment rates, most SFI standards will only provide a small financial benefit to many farmers when the costs of undertaking SFI actions are included. However, those farmers who are already carrying out some of the actions required and don't have to take land out of production will benefit the most.

The net effect of participation will vary greatly between individual farms. The SFI will not replace Direct Payments, even for those most efficient at producing environmental goods, so it is important that farmers consider the SFI within a wider review of their business in order to ensure they mitigate the loss of Direct Payments and remain profitable throughout the agricultural transition period and beyond.

Key messages for both the pilot and SFI 2022:

- If farmers are already carrying out actions on-farm which are required under the SFI, it is beneficial to join the scheme because they will receive extra income
- If farmers are not carrying out the actions required, but their farm set-up will allow them to do so with little additional cost, it is beneficial to join the scheme
- For farmers where this is less apparent, carrying out the calculations for their own farms is recommended to see if taking part in the scheme will be worthwhile for them



Calculate your fertiliser use

An energy crisis and war in Ukraine have contributed to unprecedentedly high fertiliser prices. Many livestock producers are thinking about whether it is still economically viable to apply nitrogen fertiliser to grassland or buy in feed instead. AHDB's Farm Economics Analyst, Mark Topliff has the answer.



The widely reported energy crisis may have caused our domestic energy bills to increase, but it has also led to dramatic price hikes for nitrogen fertilisers. As such, it has left many producers questioning whether to reduce nitrogen fertiliser applications or look for alternative options.

In response to this, AHDB has created a Nitrogen Fertiliser Calculator. You can use this tool to work out the cost versus the benefit of applying nitrogen fertiliser to grassland. Accounting for fertiliser and feed prices, it calculates the cost of nitrogen application and then compares it with the feed value of grass. This will help with the decision on whether it is more cost-effective to apply nitrogen fertiliser to grassland or purchase feed instead.

What does the tool calculate?

The tool calculates:

- Cost of nitrogen fertiliser and application (£/kg)
- Grass feed value (£/kg dry matter)
- Cost/benefit ratio
- Cost/benefit result

The results provided can aid decision making. However, local adjustments may be required to fit specific circumstances.

What figures (inputs) are required by the tool?

The cost/benefit calculation is based on seven inputted figures:

- Fertiliser product price (£/t)
- Fertiliser product nitrogen content (%)
- Fertiliser spreading cost (£/ha), a typical figure is provided
- Number of nitrogen applications (per year)
- Total nitrogen fertiliser applied (kg N/ha per year)
- Feed/blend/concentrate price (£/t)
- Dry matter of feed (%), a typical figure is provided

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TOP TIPS:

1. Soil test! This will allow for more accurate, efficient and cost-effective nutrient applications.
2. Check soil pH – ensure it is at an optimum*.
3. Analyse FYM (Farmyard Manure) and slurry to understand nutrient analysis, it can vary hugely.
4. Use the Nutrient Management Guide RB209 to help you make the most of organic materials and balance the benefits of fertiliser against costs.
5. Looking for fertiliser alternatives? Clovers, mixed species swards and rotational grazing can help.

For more information and to try out the new calculator, visit the knowledge library area of our website bit.ly/3qKJLPb

*6–6.5 is the optimum pH for continuous grass on mineral soils. For more information see the Nutrient Management Guide (RB209) Section 1.



ROTATIONAL GRAZING

has revolutionised the way we graze our cows



James Herrick is a suckler farmer based in Leicestershire, farming in partnership with his parents. He has seen significant financial and herd performance benefits with rotational grazing over the last two years. He shares his experiences with AHDB Knowledge Exchange Manager, Emma Steele.

Farm Facts

- 450 acres of arable/grass (50:50)
- 140 spring calving suckler cows, British Blue x British Freisans, plus some stabilisers
- Finish cattle and sell to slaughter

How it began

“It was actually my dad who had heard about rotational grazing and was keen to give it a try after some farmers claimed to have seen up to 50% more grass growth from it. I was sceptical at first, but my dad set up a rotation for a small proportion of the herd. It wasn’t until I went to check the cows myself one day and move the fencing that I saw just how good the grass was looking. There was much more grass than we have had in previous years. I was amazed at the difference, and so we got ourselves well-equipped and set ourselves up rotationally grazing all of the cattle on the farm,” James said.

Day-to-day management

“We move the fences every day and incorporate it into our daily checks. We use reels to split the fields up but don’t currently have a specific measure on the size of the field, we just go by eye on how grazed the paddock is from the day before. However, this is something we are looking at changing this year. We plan to map out one-hectare sections so that we can be more accurate in measuring and rationing the grass.

“The way I see it, you are going to do daily checks anyway and that extra 15 minutes per day has extended our grazing system by several weeks, so it makes a big difference,” says James.

Achieving good grass growth

“Up until now, we have always gone by eye when it comes to grass growth, however, we have recently invested in a plate meter to allow us more accuracy. We now have so much grass that we often find in late spring/early summer, the grass is getting away from us, so we cut the surplus grass to silage and re-start the rotation.

“This has meant that we have been able to turn the cows out earlier without a concern that we are going to run out of grass. Before we started rotational grazing, we would house in November, whereas now it is closer to Christmas time. So that provides big cost savings in terms of reduced straw and silage, but has also reduced labour and machinery costs,” explains James.

Herd health and productivity

“Aside from the financial benefits, we have seen great results in cow productivity and health status. The cows are in better condition than before, which means they don’t require supplementary feed. If anything, we have had to lean them off a bit, so they are not too fat to calve.

“We have also seen 100% of our bulling heifers in calf since rotational grazing. We bull about 35 heifers and would expect three or four to not get into calf in any one year, so to see a 100% success rate is incredible.

“We found that some of the store cattle put on a good frame by being outside longer and when we bring them in it is easier to increase growth rates on a finishing ration. It has just revolutionised the way we graze our cows and I question why we didn’t get started sooner,” concludes James.

TOP TIPS:

- Have a good set of reels with good poly wire
- Speak to the British Grassland Society and find a grass mentor in your area
- Follow the rule of three: Graze your grass at the three-leaf stage, don't graze a paddock for longer than three days, leave the paddock to rest for three weeks

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Listen to our latest grazing podcast with James here:
bit.ly/3EU3cq4 and follow his grazing journey on
Instagram @baldys_farm or YouTube Baldy's Farm

The story of UK beef and lamb exports



Despite the challenges that 2021 brought to international trade flow, the UK beef and lamb exports added nearly £900 million to the sectors and saw in excess of 200,000 tonnes of product exported around the world. AHDB's Jonathan Eckley, Head of Asia Pacific Export, explains more.



Strong demand on the domestic market, global logistic disruptions, a change in how the UK trades with the EU market and the continued impact of coronavirus all affected trade throughout 2021.

Despite the UK's new trading relationship with EU Member States, the European bloc remained by far the largest market for both UK exports, accounting for 71% of total beef and 92% of lamb shipments in the year. France remained the largest market for UK lamb, taking half of our exports, and was also a close second, behind Ireland, for beef.

Reaching new audiences

Trade shows are an important platform for AHDB to host UK meat exporters and showcase quality lamb and beef to in-market buyers. The SIAL trade show in Paris, this autumn, will be particularly important as we emerge from the pandemic. The show attracts buyers from around the world and provides a great opportunity for us to highlight our fantastic beef and lamb products.

Despite the impact of the pandemic on trade flows to markets further afield than the EU, there are a number of interesting markets that have emerged over the past year. The Asia region was the second-largest regional market for UK beef and lamb exports, and shipments to the region accounted for 14% of total UK beef exports.

2021 was the first full year following access to the United States for UK beef and saw £11 million of beef heading across the Atlantic. We are hopeful the market will also open to UK lamb this year. Hong Kong has been an important market for our exports, being one of the most visited cities in the world. Demand from the Philippines has been strong with our exports increasing by a third in 2021. Japan, which only reopened to UK beef in 2019, has increased imports from the UK by 50%, valued at nearly £10 million.



Driven by the AHDB exports team

AHDB has led missions to several countries over the past 12 months, despite the travel restrictions and sanctions related to coronavirus. While high-value exports are key, finding markets for lower value cuts and cuts with little demand domestically is essential in maximising the value of the entire carcass. In 2021, there was a 15% increase in shipment to the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, driven by demand from Sub-Saharan Africa for fifth-quarter product. Markets like Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal have been appearing on the list of destinations for UK exports in 2021. AHDB's exports team are key to building new relationships and introducing our exporters to key importers and distributors in these markets.

For more information on AHDB exports activity, visit ahdb.org.uk/exports

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Making tenancy agreements WORK FOR YOU

The differing tenancy agreements in the agricultural industry each serve a different purpose. A Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) is an agreement between a landlord and tenant allowing the tenant unrestricted access to land for a defined period of time. AHDB's Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager, Amy Hughes, hosted a recent webinar to find out more.



In a rapidly changing industry, farmers and landowners are looking for opportunities to strengthen their performance and secure a viable future for their business. This was evident when nearly 100 levy payers and next-generation farmers signed up to take part in AHDB's recent webinar with Robert Sullivan from GSC Grays, rural land and property specialists, to learn about business tenancies (FBT), contract farming agreements (CFA) and share farming agreements (SFA).

During the webinar, Robert explained what the main differences were between the agreements, in relation to capital, payment schemes and responsibilities.

"People are often very uncertain surrounding CFA's and SFA's and so avoid applying for them. However, with FBTs becoming less available, people are missing a trick by not considering other options," said Robert.

"CFA's and SFA's offer landowners more flexibility and input into how their land is farmed. They generally, also give a more consistent return to both parties. The capital needed for a CFA or SFA is usually less than it would be for an FBT, creating more opportunities for young people to get into farming.

"When looking around a farm, don't forget that you are also being viewed as well. You need to be presentable, engage in conversation, make notes and take the opportunity to find out about the owner's objectives and aspiration for their farm or land."

When sharing advice on submitting a tender, financial viability, technical competency and plans to make the business environmentally and socially acceptable were top of the list.

"Your tender needs to make you stand out from the crowd. Your proposal should be realistic, well thought through and sustainable. However, people shouldn't be afraid to talk about their failures when applying for tenancies or agreements. As long as you can show that you learnt from it, it makes you more human," says Robert.

"Applications should always be based on what information was given in the particulars and further information gained from the viewing day. As well as a robust business plan, applicants' objectives for the future direction and growth of the business should also be shared.

"It goes without saying that tender documents should be presented well, checked for spelling and grammar and ideally, not handwritten. A covering letter should always be included to set the scene," Robert concludes.

For more detail on the differences between agreements, financial information and advice on interviews, watch the full webinar on the AHDB Beef & Lamb YouTube channel youtu.be/UMKOfyZDuuc

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Let AHDB's AgriLeader programme take your business to the next level



Designed to inspire and challenge your thinking on business-related topics, our AgriLeader programme provides farmers and growers with the unique opportunity to develop leadership skills and learn how to become more resilient in times of change. Izak Van Heerden, Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager, explains more.



The programme focuses on leadership, growth and resilience across three key areas:



Leading yourself –
developing a growth mindset and becoming more resilient



Leading people –
inspiring everyone involved in your business to have a shared vision



Leading business –
creating opportunities and questioning assumptions

Earlier this year, the first cross-sector AgriLeader forum was held at the East Midlands Conference Centre in Nottingham, which attracted over 120 levy payers from all four sectors.

Aimed to inspire and challenge in equal measure, the two days were packed with engaging sessions, Q&A panels, and guest speakers, including four-time Olympian Chemmy Alcott. Attendees were pushed out of their comfort zones to encourage self-evaluation and identify ways to improve.

Ben Harman (pictured above, left), who is a pedigree Charolais producer from Buckinghamshire, explains why he thinks it is important to get out and learn from others.

He said, "I found the forum extremely useful and liked that it was more business-focused than farm-focused because it gave a different perspective.

I learnt to be more mindful about myself and how I run the business, and I heard from other business owners about their views on future-proofing and preparing for changes in market conditions.

The highlight for me was spending time with some of the AHDB staff. They have such great passion and knowledge, and

they care about the farmers who they represent. I would recommend events like this to any farmer wanting to progress their business."

Izak van Heerden, who leads AHDB's AgriLeader programme, said, "I have organised and attended a lot of AHDB events over the years, but the forum is like no other. The openness, and eagerness, to share thoughts and opinions was extraordinary. As well as the willingness to question why and how one does things – it is in these circumstances where change happens."

AgriLeader Forum is part of AHDB's AgriLeader programme, which challenges individuals to develop the skills they need to drive their business forward. #AgriLeadership week kicked off on social media on 16 May 2022.

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Reasons to invest in a maternal ram

Investing in maternal rams with superior genetics can increase the productivity and profitability of sheep enterprises. Laura Eyles, Senior Signet Breeding Specialist, explains why Signet-recorded rams with high Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) are worth the investment.



Over the past 50 years, advances within sheep production systems including flock identification, record keeping, ultrasound scanning, handling systems, and computing power, have transformed our ability to use information to identify and breed from sheep with superior genetics.

It is difficult to identify the best sheep by eye alone, particularly for maternal traits. For this reason, data services were developed to get a greater understanding of a flock's performance and the genetic merit of individual sheep within it. Thus, allowing breeders an unbiased way to find those in the flock with the best genetic potential.

EBVs predict an animal's breeding potential for a range of traits and are a useful tool to aid the selection of breeding stock. Through the statistical analysis of farm records, we can determine how much of an animal's performance is due to their genetics and how much is due to environmental influences, like their farm of origin, sex, age and rear type.

To help ram buyers identify high performing sheep, EBVs are weighted within a maternal breeding index, taking into account their economic importance in meeting a specific breeding objective.

New approach to maternal breeding evaluations

Signet's re-launch of the Maternal Breeding Evaluation follows a similar programme of work with Terminal Sire and Hill breeds in recent years. The new evaluation is a mixed breed model and includes the Bluefaced Leicester, Charmoise Hill, Easycare, Exlana, Jacob, Lley, Romney, Roussin, TEFRom and Wiltshire Horn breeds and their crosses.

The new analysis for maternal breeds aims to:

- Enhance lamb growth rates and muscling while selecting more prolific ewes with superior maternal performance
- Generate a set of breeding values that are more relevant and easier to interpret by commercial ram buyers
- Enhance existing EBVs; lambing ease, birth weight, litter size, maternal ability and faecal egg count have all been updated using the latest research
- Provide more regular breeding evaluations
- Update breeding indexes for dual purpose maternal and crossing breeds



Ewe Efficiency

Ewe mature weight (at mating) and body condition score BCS (at mating) are new traits within the evaluation that help us to assess ewe efficiency. As a result of continued selection for faster lamb growth rates, mature ewe weights will increase. By assessing all of these attributes we can select more efficient ewes.

Worm resistance

Sheep display genetic variation in terms of their ability to resist parasites and this can be exploited in breeding programmes. For many years breeders have selected sheep with superior EBVs for faecal egg count (FEC). More recent work at Glasgow University has shown that antibody responses can also be used as a biological marker for host response to infection. This phenotype provides a new way to identify genetic differences between sheep in their resistance to worm challenge and a breeding value of this trait has just been released.

Changes to the use of ultrasound scanning data

Signet recording flocks use ultrasound scanning to identify sheep with superior muscling, while avoiding those likely to be excessively fat.

Historically, scanning has been conducted around 21 weeks of age. However, in recent years, Signet has changed its guidance to focus on the weight of lambs at scanning rather than their age. Adjusting for the weight of the lamb is more commercially relevant and breeders now aim to scan lambs around 40 kg.

Within maternal breeding programmes, it enables producers to breed lambs with a better yield of meat in their carcass without generating large increases in ewe mature size.

AHDB levy drives genetic improvement

Around 30–40% of the costs of data analysis, ultrasound scanning and CT scanning within UK sheep breeding programmes are derived from levy funding, keeping recording costs low to increase the impact of Signet's work.

This is a significant investment, but one that makes a big impact, with genetic improvement worth over £20 million per annum to the UK sheep and beef industry.

Did you know?

Signet records tens of thousands of sheep data each year and currently hosts the flock books for the Roussin and Romney Societies, providing breeding values for all the registered sheep in these breeds. All the breeding values generated in Signet's sheep breeding programmes are available online at www.signetdata.com. Ram buyers can search for individual sheep, flocks and sheep currently for sale.

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Signet 
BREEDING SERVICES



Cheshire farmer moves closer to making £30,000 wage from sucklers



Ian Norbury, a Cheshire beef farmer, moved back to the family farm ten years ago with the aim that the business would produce a wage for him of £30,000 per year (just above the average UK annual salary in 2012 of £26,500). Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager, Sarah Pick, hears his story.





“When I moved back to the farm, we had around 60 cows which were crossbreds produced from our disbanded dairy herd. I knew I was never going to be able to produce my target of £30,000 income; things had to change,” says Ian.

In 2017, Ian became an AHDB Strategic Farmer and this was when things really started to accelerate. “I was provided with a consultant who advised me that I needed to significantly increase cow numbers to spread my fixed costs.”

Ian set about doubling the herd size, moving from 60 to 120 cows over the four-year period. During this time, he also moved from crossbreds to pedigree Angus’s, setting up the Mobberley Angus herd.

Ian says, “I increased herd size at the same time as trying to reduce my calving period. That year I bulled all the females on the farm. I used four bulls across the herd to try and ensure good conception rates. That year I managed to reduce the calving period from 21 to 16 weeks, and I am now down to 12 weeks.”

Ian has found that reducing the calving period has made management easier. He only has occasional labour and therefore manages calving himself, with the use of his newly installed CCTV system which enables him to keep an eye on the cows when he isn’t in the calving shed.

One of the most successful ways Ian has managed to reduce his costs is by reducing his wintering housing period. “After weaning in November cows are outwintered on kale and unwrapped bales of hay. The bales are made in the field, and we spread them out how we will feed them come winter. I always make sure I put one at either end of the field, in case there are any bully cows.”

In winter 2021, cows spent 120 days on the kale and were housed ready for calving on 20 February. “The cows are healthier, better outside and it’s cheaper for us. By reducing my housing period, I have managed to cut my wintering costs from £1.30 to £0.80 per day per cow, which when calculated across 120 cows soon adds up.”

Cows calve inside and are then turned out when the calves are around 2–3 weeks of age. Ian tries to manage when cows calve by timing when he feeds them silage. “By getting the silage analysed, I work out exactly how much silage the cows need, I then feed them in the evening because they generally seem to calve during the day then.”

Ian assists very few cows to calve. Using easy calving bulls and managing the cows well seems to keep this to a minimum.

Over the past ten years, Ian has reduced his average cow size from 788 kg to 660 kg. “It’s cheaper and more efficient to look after smaller cows. I am also noticing that their progeny finish better on a forage-based diet.”

Looking to the future, Ian wants to reduce his inputs further. “This year I am not going to apply any fertiliser. By using rotational grazing and making the use of mixed species swards, I am hoping I will be able to manage without it. When you do the sums, it just doesn’t add up, when I am only making a margin of between £100–200 per cow. I would need to keep a lot of cows just to pay the fertiliser bill. I am better off reducing numbers if I need to.”

Ian also aims to reduce his costs further by weaning later and keeping more cows outside for longer. He thinks deferred grazing might be the answer.

The changes Ian has made to improve cow performance are clear and although he hasn’t yet reached his target of making a wage of £30,000 per year, he is a lot closer now than he was ten years ago.

FARM FACTS

- 100 ha of grass and forage located near Knutsford, Cheshire
- 110 pedigree and crossbred Angus cows
- Youngstock sold deadweight to ABP
- Produces Mobberley Angus pedigree bulls
- Homebred heifer replacement policy, calving at 24 months of age
- Previous AHDB Beef & Lamb Strategic Farmer

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REDUCING LABOUR AND MEDICINE COSTS THROUGH Targeted Selective Treatment

The TST system selects animals for treatment on an individual rather than group basis. It has the potential to cut labour and medicine costs and reduce the risk of anthelmintic resistance. Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager, Sarah Pick, speaks to a Northumbrian farmer to find out more.

G Sordy & Son of Alnham Farm, Northumberland is looking to implement targeted selective treatment (TST) to reduce costs whilst maintaining flock performance. With the flock at Alnham Farm consisting of over 4,500 lambs, this could work out to be a big saving.

Whenever a wormer is used it selects for resistance. TST looks to leave a portion of the flock undrenched so that some of the worms are not exposed to the drug, thus slowing the rate of resistance.

Within a mob there will be a portion of lambs that, despite challenge, are performing well and are unlikely to show response to wormer treatment. These are the ones we want to leave untreated, instead targeting treatment to those lambs that will benefit.

Identifying these lambs is based on setting a target growth rate below which treatment will be administered. AHDB Beef & Lamb Monitor Farmers, G Sordy & Son plan to trial using TST on one group of lambs, with the aim of reducing anthelmintic use in that group by 50%, whilst maintaining growth rates.

Farm vet and steering group member, Joe Henry from Blacksheep Farm Health says, 'It's important that we protect the effectiveness of the wormers we have available by reducing selection for resistance. TST can help us move away from whole group treatments without compromising performance.'

Collecting weights and growth rate data is key to the success of TST. It is also important to be able to quickly and easily make a decision about whether or not to treat and this will be a key focus of the trial at Alnham.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how we can easily implement TST on Alnham and hopefully roll it out across the whole of the flock. Using the EID data, we also have the potential to select replacements from those sheep that are less affected by worms," says Joe Henry.

Harry Sordy (pictured below), will be hosting an on-farm event on 8 June 2022, where you can find out more about implementation of TST. Keep an eye on the AHDB events page to book your free place ahdb.org.uk/events



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Preparation for next year's LAMBING STARTS NOW

As the 2022 lambing season comes to a close, why not take the opportunity to get the farm team and your vet together to review how lambing went? Recording flock performance, lamb losses and setting targets for next year can help to improve next year's lambing outcome. AHDB's Animal Health and Welfare Scientist, Dr Amey Brassington, outlines how to get started.



Understandably, after many long hours lambing, enthusiasm may be dwindling as you are ready to move on with other jobs that need doing. However, taking time now to reflect on the performance of the flock whilst it's fresh in your mind might make all the difference to next year's lambing output. Improved performance at lambing is determined by ewe management throughout the year, and now is the time to consider changes that might help.

Use the table below to reflect and set targets for next year:

Metric	Results 2022	Agreed target for 2023
Ewes tupped		
Scanning percentage (%)		
Barren ewes		
Lamb losses (birth to 7 days) (%)		
Lambing percentage (%)		
Ewes turned out with lambs at foot		

Taking stock of flock performance

The AHDB Neonatal Survival project found that over a third of sheep farmers reported having no record of lamb losses. Simple data collected during the lambing period can be used to improve your flock's performance. Consider what information you gathered at lambing time and what additional information might be useful for making more informed decisions.

Areas to review:

- How many ewes went to the tup versus how many ewes have a lamb at foot. We can then look at any ewes that don't have lambs and why that may be.
- Comparing lambs born alive with lambs scanned, shows the number of lambs lost during pregnancy. This can point to underlying issues such as disease or inadequate nutrition.
- Lamb losses in the first few days of life may highlight underlying issues related to health, hygiene or colostrum intake and quality. Clean lambing pens reduce the risk of spreading disease from one ewe/lamb to another.
- High numbers of barren ewes can indicate issues with ewe fertility; one of the main drivers underlying the output of a sheep flock. Optimising fertility increases the number of lambs scanned and born, which in turn drives flock profitability.
- Lambing intervention and nursing take time and could be prevented by selecting ewes for good maternal ability, milkiness and lambing ease.
- Better recording of health information such as prolapses, mastitis and lameness will help with culling decisions. Efficient culling can increase flock performance by increasing lamb output and reducing lambing problems and vet/medicine costs.

Sheep production is an ever-evolving cycle. Lambing next year starts now, planning could save you time and save lambs' lives. Involving the whole team in the action plan and displaying it for all to see will ensure maximum commitment.

Order a flock notebook to help keep track of your flock's data. Email BRP@ahdb.org.uk with your name and address.

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GET AHEAD OF THE HERD: BVD free in five steps

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) is one of the biggest disease issues facing the UK cattle industry. The key to successful control and elimination of BVD is to identify and remove all animals persistently infected (PI) with the BVD virus from the national cattle herd. AHDB's Animal Health and Welfare Scientist, Lorna Gow, explains how.



For the next three years, the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway (see page 21) will provide new funds for farmers in England to support tackling this contagious and costly disease.

BVDFree England is a voluntary industry-led scheme, working to eliminate Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) from all cattle in England. The scheme, now in its sixth year, is built around a national database. It provides farmers with recognition, confidence and traceability when buying and selling BVDFree cattle. Lorna says: "With 42% of England's beef breeding herd registered with it and new funds available for testing through the Pathway, never has there been a better time to join the scheme as we work together to eliminate this disease".

The five steps to getting and staying BVDFree

- 1: Register with BVDFree England via our website
- 2: Contact your lab to upload any historical results and continue testing as normal
- 3: Ensure that we hold at least two annual test results for you
- 4: Complete 'BVDFree Test Negative Herd Status' form
- 5: Renew your 'BVDFree Test Negative Herd Status' form annually

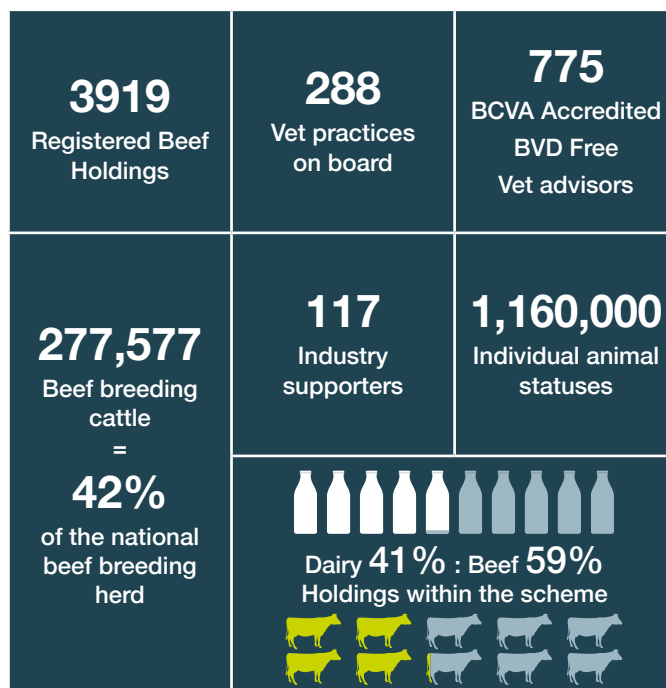
The scheme is free to join. Farmers can register via the BVDFree website using the individual holding (CPH) number as a unique identifier. The only cost to the farmer is:

- BVD testing costs, (support is available via the Pathway)
- An upload fee of 25p per tag and test result or 50p per blood result, charged through the lab

BVDFree England is supported by the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), National Beef Association (NBA), The British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA), Holstein UK (HUK), Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA), and the National Farmers Union (NFU) as well as over 100 other industry supporters.

We will bring you further details on the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway and support offered for BVD control as information becomes available.

For more information on the scheme and to register your herd, visit bvdfree.org.uk



Farmers to access new funds through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway



Farmers are experiencing the most rapid period of change in 50 years. To remain profitable in these challenging times, farm businesses need to adapt. In England, policy changes – removal of Direct Payments and phasing in of new policies under the Agricultural Transition Plan – will see public money used to deliver public goods. The repositioned funding aims to benefit animal health and welfare, farm productivity, food security, public health, UK trade and the environment. AHDB's Animal Health and Welfare Senior Scientist, Dr Lis King, tells more.

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway is a long-term, government-industry project partnership across cattle (beef and dairy), sheep, pig and poultry (layer and broiler) sectors to support continual improvement in health and welfare. The first of four steps will launch in Spring 2022 to provide farmers in England with a fully funded vet visit.

Pathway benefits for farmers

Step 1: The annual health and welfare review

From Spring 2022, farmers can have a fully funded, annual farm visit, from their own vet for up to three years (to 2024). Initially available for cattle, sheep and pig farmers eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and who have more than 10 cattle, 20 sheep or 50 pigs. Industry-agreed payment rates, per review, include testing for priority diseases.

The table below shows payment rates and priority areas

Annual review	Review payment	Review includes test for:	Priority area:
Sheep	£436	Anthelmintic resistance	Anthelmintic resistance
Beef cattle	£522	Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD)	BVD
Dairy cattle	£372		

Step 2: Capital grants

From late 2022, farmers can apply for grants to co-fund capital investments that support key health and welfare priorities. Farmers will be able to determine, with their vet, the most appropriate investments for their farm and animals.

- Small grants – selected from a list of equipment and technology items
- Larger grants – for new housing, building upgrades and pasture improvements

Step 3: Disease eradication control programmes

From 2023, a financial support package will be available for farmers to prevent and reduce priority diseases.

Step 4: Payment-by-results

Payment-by-results will reward farmers who demonstrate high health and welfare outcomes in herds and flocks. Trials likely in 2023, with national roll out in 2025.

Cattle vet Jonathan Statham, who has worked with the team developing the Pathway, says, “The Pathway is all about the farmer’s own vet working with the farmer on an individual farm basis. So, if you are sheep, cattle or mixed, if you are farm assured, if you are non-farm assured, we will have a format that covers your farm’s needs.”

Further details available at: Animal Health and Welfare Pathway – bit.ly/3vnNLmM

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway forms part of the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) supporting:

- Sustainable food production founded on high welfare
- Disease prevention
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Reduced GHG emissions

EWE CONDITION AND EIGHT-WEEK LAMB WEIGHTS

has emerged as an important KPI for sheep farmers

AHDB's Knowledge Exchange Manager, Dr Nerys Wright, highlights key milestones within the sheep calendar year that have long-term impact on flock fertility and lamb growth rates. She shares findings from her PhD research including the importance of ewe condition and lamb weights at eight weeks post-lambing.



Ewe Body Condition Score (BCS) during lactation

Ewe performance during lactation is dependent on ewe condition at lambing and the reserves available to the ewe to mobilise and meet the demands of milk production. If nutrition does not meet the increased requirements of lactation, or ewes have limited fat reserves, this will result in a decrease in milk yield and reduced lamb growth rates. If ewes are below BCS 3 at lambing and/or mobilise more than one unit of BCS during lactation, this will result in ewes weaning at, or below, BCS 2. Not only does this have a negative effect on lamb daily live weight gain (DLWG) in that production year, but this poor condition will also have a negative effect on scanning percentage and lamb DLWG up to and including weaning of the next production cycle too.

Lamb weights

Lamb eight-week weight is an important KPI for sheep farms, with an individual lamb target of 20 kg (adjusted for lamb age of 56 days) recommended. This figure is based on 5 kg birthweight and an average DLWG of 270 g/day from birth to eight weeks. This target can be altered depending on flock performance and for some farms, may be higher. Lamb weight at eight weeks post-lambing is key to the future performance of the lamb. Lambs that are heavier at eight weeks are heavier at weaning and gain more weight between eight weeks and weaning. Another AHDB funded PhD reported that lambs which were heavier at weaning were also significantly more likely to have leaner and more muscular carcasses, producing significantly more valuable carcasses at slaughter.

Lambs weighing less than 17 kg (15% less than the flock's target of 20 kg) were classed as 'light lambs'. The percentage of lambs that fell into this category varied by year and across farms, with a range of 7% to 35%.

There are no national targets to compare these observations with, however, the data suggests that a realistic target is for fewer than 15% of lambs to be below 17 kg at eight weeks post-lambing. The percentage of light lambs reduced as ewe BCS improved and achieved the target BCS at various points during the production cycle. Other factors that contributed to the percentage of light lambs were ewe age (shearing ewes contributed significantly more light lambs than older ewes), mastitis (clinical cases in ewes resulted in lighter lambs) and ewe lameness.

Deciding when to wean should be flexible and in response to the conditions on the farm that year: for example, the quality and quantity of feed available to both ewes and lambs, and ewe condition and/or lamb performance at eight weeks. It is recommended that weaning takes place after 12 weeks, allowing plenty of time for ewes to gain condition for the next production cycle. By 12 weeks, lambs receive very little nutrition from milk, with ewes and lambs often competing for feed, which could negatively affect both lamb DLWG and ewe condition. However, a recent survey found that two-thirds of farms weaned between 14 and 20 weeks of age.

Key points

- Weigh lambs at eight weeks – aim for 20 kg
- Assess ewe condition at eight weeks – aim for BCS >2.5
- Utilise this information to decide when weaning should take place
- Decide on any interventions required e.g. additional feeding for thin ewes or light lambs or manage them as a separate group until weaning
- Assess ewe condition at weaning – aim for BCS >2.5
- Management of shearing ewes is important to reduce the number of light lambs

Watch out for further articles on findings from the Sheep KPI Project and associated PhD in future issues of Ruminant News. A summary of Nerys' thesis will soon be available on the AHDB website. The Sheep KPI project was funded by AHDB and delivered by Lesley Stubbings, Liz Genever, The University of Nottingham and farmers Matt Blyth, Gareth Owen and Malcolm and Judith Sanderson alongside software support from Border Software.

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To see how to assess
Body Condition Scores
routinely on-farm view
bit.ly/BCSYouTubevideo

NEWS & UPDATES

DIARY DATES

We have a range of on-farm events planned for this summer, helping you to meet like-minded people and make real on-farm changes.

Farm Excellence

25 May – Grazing and parasite control, Shropshire

26 May – Cheshire Strategic Farm closing meeting

7 June – Reducing nitrogen use and maximising grazing, Cumbria

8 June – Improving farm resilience, Northumberland

9 June – How to get to Net Zero, Herefordshire

16 June – Are worm burdens affecting the performance of your lambs? Lincolnshire

7 July – Gloucestershire Strategic Farm closing meeting

Shows

28 May – NBA Beef Expo, Darlington

27 July – NSA Sheep event, Malvern

Keep an eye on our events page, for the most up-to-date information and details on how to book your place: ahdb.org.uk/events

RECOMMENDED GRASS AND CLOVER LISTS (RGCL)

The Recommended Grass and Clover Lists (RGCL) for England and Wales provides a recommendation on grass and clover varieties, which are drawn up after rigorous testing for attributes such as yield, persistency, quality and disease resistance. The data comes from trials carried out by the NIAB-TAG, Barenbrug, IBERS, DLF Seeds, DSV, AFBI and SRUC, and are evaluated by a panel of experts.

To order your free updated copy of the RGCL Guide, you can use our online order form ahdb.org.uk/ahdb-beef-lamb-order-form, email brp@ahdb.org.uk or call the team 01904 771214.



AHDB'S SHAPE THE FUTURE UPDATE

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to register and vote in our Shape The Future campaign. Voting has now closed and the results are being reviewed by the AHDB sector councils. We look forward to sharing the results with you in the coming months.

FOOD & FARMING PODCASTS

The Food & Farming podcast from AHDB releases regular podcasts containing interviews and topical discussions with a range of guests including farmers, independent consultants and specialists within the industry. Be sure to subscribe to the channel to be notified when a new podcast is out; you can even listen while you work or are out and about on the farm. The channel keeps you up to date and at the heart of the conversation. Visit the website ahdb.org.uk/food-farming-podcast



BETTER RETURNS
Calf rearing notebook

