

# RUMINANT NEWS

AT THE HEART OF THE BEEF & LAMB INDUSTRY

**Farm Excellence:**  
lots to catch up on and  
plenty to look forward to

**Maternal Matters –**  
providing a much needed  
focus on the female

**What you get  
for your levy**

How much your fee is and where it goes?

**Your FREE copy of the RGCL included inside**



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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](http://ahdb.org.uk)

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# WELCOME

**Will Jackson, Divisional Director - Engagement**



**We've been delighted to finally see some of you again as our events return on farm. Our 2017 Strategic Farmers kicked us off with a look at what they'd been up to during their environment themed events in July. Our new Monitor Farmers opened up their farms in August and September to start their journey with you all. And in October, we'll be saying goodbye to our original Strategic Farms and seeing what they've achieved in their four years with us. Find out more on page 8.**

Our new Maternal Matters two-year campaign has launched, which will look at how improving maternal productivity can minimise costs. More details can be found on page 18.

Find out more about how we've reached nearly one million educators with our Food – a fact of life information ensuring that children are presented with accurate information about the importance of a balanced diet. And also how we're going out to millions of people with the second part of our successful We Eat Balanced campaign. All this information is on page 23.

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





# BEEF & LAMB: How AHDB's Beef & Lamb presence is global

**The world is changing, and the UK sheep and beef industry must adapt to ensure it's resilient to these changes.**

**We've recently seen the announcement of the UK-Australia free trade deal, which I know has caused concern. Our analysis shows it shouldn't have much impact in the short term, with Australia coming out of an extended period of drought and current tariffs making it less competitive. But with the tariffs disappearing in 10 years, the UK will become a more attractive market, particularly with the sheep market in the UK towards the premium end in terms of price. Keep up to date with our analysis of this and future trade deals on our website: [ahdb.org.uk/trade-and-policy](https://ahdb.org.uk/trade-and-policy)**

In addition to the changing global landscape, this year will see the changes in farm support, with the phasing out of basic payments and the move to alternative farm support structures. The first 5% drop in basic payments will be felt this year, rising over the coming years. Change is likely to be needed to mitigate the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities. To support the farmers who fund AHDB, we have secured £3.9m of additional funding from DEFRA to help farmers future proof their businesses.

AHDB will provide a new farm business review tool for 4,000 grazing livestock producers and cereal and oilseed growers in England. This will allow them to access and identify how, where and when they may need to adapt their business model, obtain tailored support to address changes and become more resilient, competitive and productive.

With the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow in November, attention will once again be focused on our impact on the planet. We know livestock in the UK have less impact than many other places in the world, but we need to demonstrate what we're doing to continue to reduce emissions. As part of our We Eat Balanced reputation campaign, we are producing materials that help you show your produce is sustainable. **More information on page 23.**

And while we're talking about reputation, medicine use continues to be on the agenda with the EU consultation on the new legislation for medicine recording in August. Although you don't need to wait until legislation is in place, you can use the medicine hub to record now. Being supported by industry, the hub provides an independent place to collate, report and compare medicine use. It allows you to understand more about the types of products you use and compare with similar enterprises. **Find out more on page 12.**





# WHAT YOU GET for your levy

**If we asked you what you get for your levy, what would you say? After speaking with our beef and lamb farmers, we realised some levy payers aren't sure how much levy they pay to AHDB or what it's spent on.**

**The responses have been varied, and yes, not all were complimentary! However, we know from speaking to you and your attendance at our events, that you have different areas you want us to focus on and you all use our services differently.**

So the short answer is your beef levy is £5.40 per head at slaughter and 80p per head for sheep. Surprised? Knew that already? But what you might not know is how we spend the money to ensure that your beef or lamb becomes more profitable.

And a note for the eagle-eyed among you that have noticed the figures on each animal don't quite add up – we also get non-levy income (grants and funding) offering extra value for levy payers on your investment.

The largest spend from your sheep levy is on opening up the export market to lamb from Britain. This money allows us to work with industry and government to identify new markets and open them up for trade.

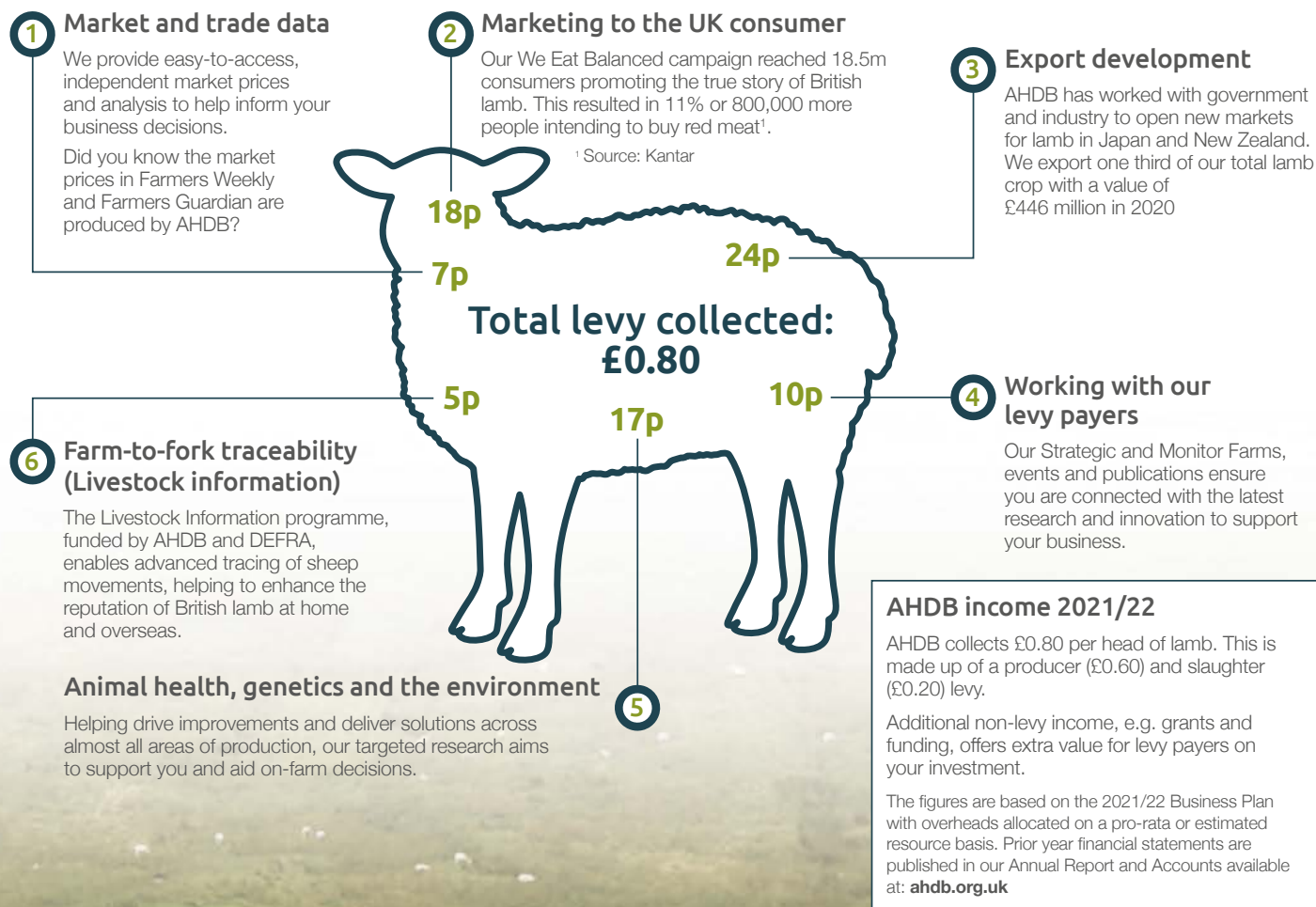
In 2020 we helped non-EU exports of sheep meat increase by 48% to £34m. At the same time, sheep meat exports to the EU were up 7% in value to £412m. We've also continued to improve our international reputation as producers of safe, wholesome, quality products.

Marketing your products to British consumers makes up the next biggest spend. The 18p per head helped drive an additional 261 tonnes of lamb to be sold as a direct result of our Make it Lamb campaign, which reached 74% of the population on TV and radio last year. We also continue to support Love Lamb Week each September, last year reaching 19 million people on social media. We will continue to challenge misinformation, including our recent successes against Quorn and the BBC on wording they've used about the environmental impact of red meat in the UK.

Our work on animal health and genetics has proven beneficial. Genetic gain within the UK is currently worth £10.7m to the sheep industry, with much of this work underpinned by AHDB's programme of research, delivery and knowledge exchange.







Part of our research has included enhancing the value of the carcase through computed tomography, identifying breeding lines that can change the weight, shape and yield of the modern lamb carcase, as well as enhancing eating quality and reducing its environmental footprint. Research at SRUC shows that rates of gain are 7–20% faster in flocks that CT scan. This is why AHDB pioneered the use of CT scanning, actively supporting breeders to use it for over 20 years for the benefit of the whole supply chain.

Signet Breeding Services is fully funded by AHDB. It promotes genetic improvement in sheep and beef cattle through the use of Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) and performance recording. Our RamCompare project has shown the use of high EBVs recorded rams can lift performance by £3–4 per lamb simply through informed ram selection. Information from the project feeds back into both our research and evaluations, enabling sheep farmers to find the most profitable sheep for their system.

For 10p a head, we bring you a whole network of Monitor and Strategic Farms, discussion groups, events and webinars. Since 2017, over 2,000 farmers have attended our on farm Strategic Farm events, with 97% of attendees saying attending the events improved their understanding of the

topic and 91% improved their technical knowledge. And, during the past year, thousands more have signed up for our webinars to keep in touch with the latest updates from the comfort of their home.

For just 7p a head, we provide robust market and trade data that farmers and industry rely on, which is accessed over 140,000 times a month. We help understand local and international trends, provide information about how the EU exit could impact the sector, and evidence on the evolving coronavirus impact to help make sense of unprecedented shifts in purchasing patterns. Plus, those price updates you see every week in Farmers Guardian and Farmers Weekly come straight from us too.

We also analyse all the latest foodservice and retail trends to provide you with the information you need. We want you as farmers, growers, retailers and processors to be as well informed about consumer behaviours and retail trends as possible.

Together with Defra, we've also funded the Livestock Information Programme to allow advanced tracing of sheep movements and enhance the reputation of British lamb at home and abroad.



# WHAT YOU GET for your levy

Just like lamb, our biggest spend of beef levy is on gaining access to new markets and extending our reach in existing ones. We had some real successes in 2020, with the first shipment of British beef in more than 20 years arriving in the US in September. We also saw £5.43m of UK beef shipped to Japan in the first full year of market access and the UK was the main European supplier of beef to Canada with a value of £17.5m.

Even through the coronavirus pandemic and the associated lack of travel, we've been finding innovative ways to reach new audiences, showcase beef from the UK and highlight our high production standards. Targeting importers, distributors, chefs, butchers, high-end grocers and the media, the series of online events included chef and butchery demonstrations, as well as panel discussions from UK red meat exporters.

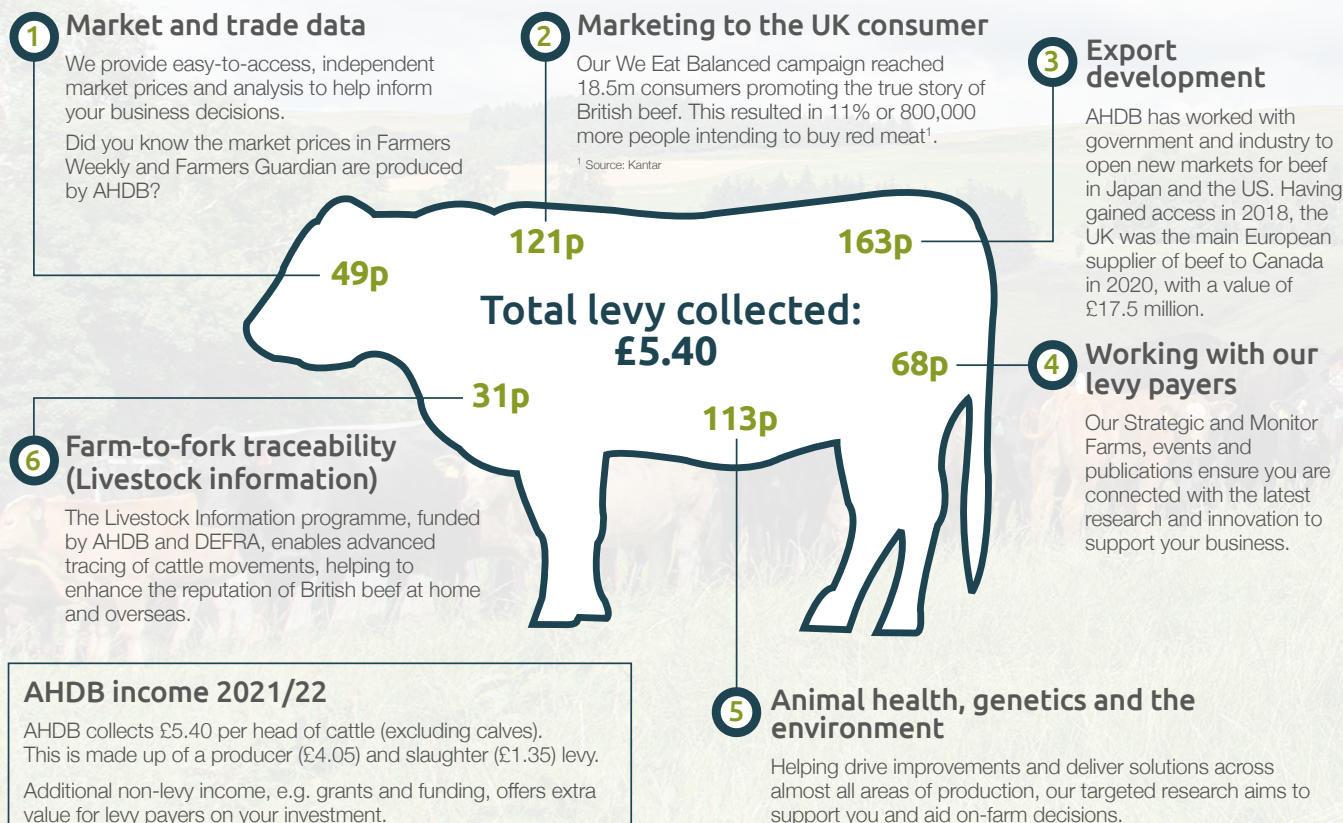
The start of this year saw the roll out of our We Eat Balanced campaign, which was seen by over 15 million households on TV. In a change to our previous campaigns, this one aimed to protect and improve longer-term consumer attitudes to British meat and dairy, with a specific focus on health, the environment, and welfare standards.

As a result of the campaign, 11% of people said they intended to buy red meat and 6% were more reassured by its nutritional value. The second part of the campaign started in September, with more information on page 23.

For £1.13, you get access to animal health and genetics research and advice. Our investment in the BVDFree scheme has ensured that nearly 40% of the national breeding herd has been signed up to help eradicate this disease that costs farmers £25–61m a year.

## BEEF

## What do I get for my levy?



### AHDB income 2021/22

AHDB collects £5.40 per head of cattle (excluding calves). This is made up of a producer (£4.05) and slaughter (£1.35) levy.

Additional non-levy income, e.g. grants and funding, offers extra value for levy payers on your investment.

The figures are based on the 2021/22 Business Plan with overheads allocated on a pro-rata or estimated resource basis. Prior year financial statements are published in our Annual Report and Accounts available at: [ahdb.org.uk](http://ahdb.org.uk)



Our EBVs help you breed for the traits you get paid for. These can be selected for days to slaughter, helping you make decisions to improve the speed of finishing or EBVs for carcass weight, conformation and fat class allow producers to improve carcass size and quality, so you can produce an end product that really fits your target market.

Once again, we're back out on farm bringing you events from our Strategic and Monitor Farmers. Over 2,000 of you have attended at least one of these events in the past four years, and many more have watched our webinars, especially during this year. With over 90% of attendees improving their understanding of the subject area and technical knowledge, we will continue to build on these successful events and listen to what you want to hear more of.

Cattle and Sheep Weekly readership has been rising by more than 50% a year, currently reaching 3,000 subscribers every week. Without the prices, the industry would lose one of its critical sources of independent price and production

information. As well as deadweight and auction market data, the team provided analysis and advice in the run-up to EU Exit, as well as weekly updates on spending on beef during the lockdown period. We invest your levy in detailed retail and foodservice data while our team of experts analyse this and other emerging trends to provide you with the information you need.

And finally, as with sheep, we invest in farm-to-fork traceability. This includes the Livestock Information Programme and ensuring medicine traceability and disease prevention which will help improve the reputation of British beef at home and abroad.

The environment is also a growing concern among consumers, policymakers and farmers. Our Environment team is active in major groups and decision-making both domestically and globally. The team focuses on helping to ensure the facts around the impact, progress and benefits of the beef and lamb industry are known.





# FARM EXCELLENCE:

## Lots to catch up on and plenty to look forward to



**It's been a busy time for our 15 Beef & Lamb Strategic Farmers. They have been working hard to implement changes which will improve the profitability of their businesses.**

Even though they haven't been able to host on-farm events, our Strategic Farmers have participated in a number of webinars, which can be found on the AHDB B&L YouTube channel. Topics covered include using soil tests to inform fertiliser decisions, increasing lamb performance on a forage based diet and getting started with rotational grazing.

Our five sheep focused Strategic Farms hosted on farm events in July – our first back on farm. These offered guests a chance to catch up on their progress, hear from technical speakers and share ideas and experiences with other farmers.

This year marks the final year for the beef focused Strategic Farmers who joined the programme in 2017. These farmers will host final on-farm events in October to highlight the changes they have made throughout the programme.

### **David Barton – Embracing the environment**

David Barton farms 103 ha in Gloucestershire. The thin Cotswold brash farm consists of 60 ha of arable land, alongside 70 Saler x Sussex homebred cows, with youngstock taken through to finish. He used to describe himself as an arable farmer with beef animals but is now a self-professed beef farmer with an environmental focus.

The main changes David has made over the past four years have focused on getting the most from forage. He has improved grass utilisation through grass measuring using a plate meter, implementing rotational grazing and making better silage.

This year, David has also introduced clover and herbal leys which has helped reduce his application of nitrogen fertiliser. The herbal ley includes a mixture of clovers, Sainfoin, perennial ryegrasses, timothy, cocksfoot and herbs. It is hoped this will also improve soil structure.

Through improving grassland management and tweaking finishing rations, David has been able to reduce age at slaughter to just 20 months – five months lower than it was at the start of the project – without any additional costs. David has also started weighing his stock regularly so that he can make tweaks to management if growth rates are not as expected.

David has been part of environmental schemes for a long time and this year joined the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) Mid-Tier. He hopes that CSS will provide him with some financial security when BPS is being phased out and the full details of ELMS are unknown. David's long term goal is to produce grass fed beef which has the lowest possible impact on the environment and the steps he has taken by being part of the Strategic Farm programme have helped him along this journey.



## Mark Jelley – Changing heifer replacement policy

Mark Jelley farms a 200 ha mixed arable and beef farm near Long Buckby, Northamptonshire. He runs a herd of 100 suckler cows, with youngstock taken through to finish.

When Mark joined the Strategic Farm programme in 2017, one of his main objectives was to improve the maternal attributes of his suckler herd. The herd traditionally consisted of purchased dairy cross Hereford cows and the system worked well because these types of heifers were readily available at reasonable prices. However, as the

years passed they became increasingly difficult to source, which meant he had to buy them from a number of farms, increasing disease risk. The final decision to change his replacement policy was made when he lost one third of his herd to TB.

To start with, Mark bought a batch of in-calf Stabiliser heifers from a neighbouring farmer. Buying from a known breeder enabled Mark to better understand the animals' genetic potential and their health status.

The following year, Mark artificially inseminated (AI) his heifers with sexed semen to provide him with even greater

control of the genetic makeup of his herd. The bulls used had strong maternal EBVs for milk, calving ease and age at first calving. Eventually, Mark would like to completely eradicate stock bulls from the farm and rely solely on AI.

Since focusing on breeding his own replacements and boosting their maternal traits, Mark has seen a reduction in age at first calving and mature cow weight and an increase in the number of cows and heifers calving unassisted. Mark discussed more about the changes to his heifer replacement policy in the webinar, **Strategic Farm: Heifers – to breed or to buy?** available on the Beef and Lamb YouTube channel.

## WELCOMING OUR NEW MONITOR FARMS

This year we have recruited four new Monitor Farms. They held on-farm events in the summer to introduce themselves and their businesses.

- David Cross of Glovers Farm, Sedgeford, Norfolk
- Ian Farrant of Underley, Tenbury Wells, Herefordshire
- Rob and Liz Priest of Kingsford Farm, Holsworthy, Devon
- Harry Sordy of Alnham Farm, Alnwick, Northumberland

A discussion group has been established around each Monitor Farm. Discussion groups provide a great opportunity to share ideas, problems and solutions with like-minded farmers in your area. Further details on how you can join these groups will be discussed at your next Monitor Farm meeting.

Book your place at [ahdb.org.uk/events](http://ahdb.org.uk/events)

### 2017 Strategic Farms

1. Edward Dean, Cumbria
2. David Monkhouse, Durham
3. Guy Prudom, North Yorkshire
4. Ian Norbury, Cheshire
5. Joe Howard, Nottinghamshire
6. Mark Jelley, Northamptonshire
7. David Barton, Gloucestershire
8. E Holdstock, Kent
9. Bertie Newman, Dorset
10. John Haimes, Devon
11. Clare Parnell and Philip Kent, Cornwall

### 2019 Strategic Farms

1. Adrian Coombe, Cornwall
2. Chris and Louise Elkington, Lincolnshire
3. Neil Brown, Shropshire
4. Richard and Laila Carruthers, Cumbria
5. Steven Lawson, Northumberland

### 2021 Monitor Farms

1. Harry Sordy, Northumberland
2. Ian Farrant, Tenbury Wells, Herefordshire
3. Rob and Liz Priest, Devon
4. David Cross, Norfolk





# CARBON FOOTPRINTING

## shows simple improvements stack up

To support agriculture achieving net-zero emissions, AHDB has conducted carbon footprinting across a number of farms from the Farm Excellence network. From the 40 farms assessed across the organisation, 10 involved Beef & Lamb Strategic Farms, whilst the others were made up of Strategic and Monitor Farms from the Cereals & Oilseeds, Dairy, Pork and Potatoes sectors.

AHDB employed consultants to perform the audits using the Agrecalc tool developed by SAC Consulting. The consultants worked with the producers and growers to input whole farm data. Once the data was validated, and carbon footprints quantified, bespoke action plans were created to suggest measures each farm could adopt in order to reduce their carbon footprints.

It may not come as a surprise to learn that enteric fermentation as a result of rumination was the greatest contributor of emissions across the majority of the beef and lamb farms. Fertiliser use came in second, followed by manures, fuel and feed respectively.

The mitigating actions comprised a variety of themes ranging from manure management to enhancing carbon sequestration.

David Barton, Beef & Lamb Strategic Farmer from Gloucestershire, said: "It's a good process as it makes

you consider everything from the diesel you put in the tractor to the energy you use on the farm. The farm performed around 26% better than average, which I'm pleased with and it's identified areas which can be improved. It's also reassuring to know the steps I've taken are already having a positive impact on the environment.

"I hope in the future for some standardisation so farmers can talk to, and compare with, each other to understand how they're doing and see what improvements can be made. And, importantly, if we have more robust data from farmers, we will be in a stronger position to challenge the media and defend the reputation of our high-quality British beef which has a low environmental impact."

As the initial carbon footprinting exercise comes to a close, AHDB has extended the cohort to another 13 farms across the sectors, with plans to launch a second wave later this year.

A more in depth look at the learnings will take place via Knowledge Exchange activities in the form of on farm events and digital webinars. Sign up online to be notified of events happening near you: [ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch form](https://ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch-form)

More information on carbon and the environment can be found at [ahdb.org.uk/the-environment](https://ahdb.org.uk/the-environment)

“...if we have more robust data from farmers, we will be in a stronger position to challenge the media and defend the reputation of our high-quality British beef which has a low environmental impact”





# SOIL HEALTH IS WEALTH

**Traditionally, soil has been undervalued across the agricultural industry. However in more recent years, we have started to appreciate the role it plays in promoting healthy livestock systems and the farming practices which help nurture it.**

Chris Elkington, a Beef & Lamb strategic farmer, has always regularly carried out soil tests at his 115 ha sheep farm in Grantham, Lincolnshire. However chemical analysis only provides one part of the story when assessing soil health. Soil physics and biology also play an important role in maintaining productive livestock systems.

With this in mind, in the autumn of 2020, Chris carried out a thorough analysis of six fields on his farm which were of particular concern, using the AHDB Soil Health Scorecard. The scorecard aims to provide information on key indicators of the chemical, physical and biological condition of soil, to help guide soil, crop and forage management decisions.

The Soil Health Scorecard found:

- 1. Physical:** Soil structure was not a problem, with some more blocky structures found in the heavier soils. However this could be a result of the soil texture rather than management.
- 2. Chemical:** No problems with pH, but phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) levels were low in some fields. The high P and K levels found in Field 1 were a result of this field being closest to the farm and having regular applications of farmyard manure.
- 3. Biological:** Organic matter was lower than expected in a grassland setting (6.4% in medium soils, 7.6% in heavy soils). However the farm has only recently been converted from arable. Earthworm numbers also highlighted the arable history.

Working with his consultant, Dr Liz Genever, Chris is working hard to rectify some of the investigative actions highlighted by the Soil Health Scorecard. This includes application of P and K across some of the fields in most need. Farmyard manure (FYM) will also be applied. However due



to Chris's predominantly outdoor system, only 40 tonnes of manure is available. Chris and Liz made the decision that this would be applied to Field 2, because not only will FYM increase P and K levels but it will also help to improve organic matter and earthworm counts, which are particularly low in this field.

Chris will also make changes to his management practices to ensure the physical and biological attributes of the soil are improved, including not allowing sheep to poach the ground during wet weather, reduced tillage intensity when reseeding fields and sourcing composted organic materials to apply to the land.

By conducting this analysis, Chris is able to make more informed decisions about his inorganic fertiliser application while also adapting management practices to improve soil health. This will undoubtedly improve the amount of lamb he is able to produce from forage – a key aim for his business.

Further information on improving soil health and the Soil Health Scorecard can be found here: [ahdb.org.uk/greatsoils](https://ahdb.org.uk/greatsoils)

Table 1. Soil Health Scorecard results, Chris Elkington

Type of analysis	Attribute	Field 1	Field 2	Field 3	Field 4	Field 5	Field 6
Physical	Soil type	Light	Medium	Medium	Heavy	Heavy	Heavy
	Soil structure	2	2	2	3	3	3
Chemical	pH	6.2	7	7.4	7.5	6.9	7.1
	Phosphorus	90.4	4.8	5	4.8	11.8	4.4
	Potassium	375	39	44.3	77	163	97.9
Biological	Organic matter (%)	5.5	4.5	4.4	6.3	6.1	6.8
	Earthworms	6	5	29	17	24	20

Green = no action required. Amber = monitor. Red = investigate.



# 'BEEFING' UP THE ARABLE ROTATION



Most arable farms were mixed enterprises a couple of generations ago, but the livestock have long since disappeared and with it the benefits they brought to the rotation. However, grass leys are slowly creeping back into the arable rotation to help enhance soil health. Could this be the perfect opportunity to consider a farming partnership or an opportunity for additional grazing?

An ongoing AHDB Beef and Lamb project has been looking closely at the benefits of bringing grass back into the arable rotation and grazing beef by bringing together farmers from the two different sectors, explains AHDB beef scientist, Rebecca Small. "The arrangement effectively enables the intensive arable enterprise to adopt 'mixed farming,' without investing in cattle and the beef enterprise, in order to expand without needing to invest in the land."

There are tangible benefits of soil improvement and blackgrass reduction from the introduction of leys and livestock into the arable rotation. There are also possible long-term benefits from the cross-sector approach.

“ By combining the two systems, there's a better utilisation of land, and all of these factors combined have a positive benefit when you look at the impact of farming from a climate change perspective ”

The project is being carried out at a Dyson farm in Somerset. The baseline assessments for soil quality characteristics, organic matter and soil biology before the ley was established have been repeated this year in order to characterise the improvements to soil quality.

The project is split into three treatments, with cattle grazed across three fields with their performance recorded. An economic analysis of introducing beef cattle into the arable rotation will be carried out, including setting up rotational grazing and the infrastructure required for a successful collaboration.

The final results of the project are due in March 2022, but look out for our webinar on the project 'Panel Discussion: Introducing cattle into arable rotations to 'beef' up the profit margin' on 18 October at 7pm. This webinar will cover the results of the research carried out by ADAS, and we will hear about the host farmers experience along with other experts.

Our ***Livestock in the arable rotation*** guide provides tips and guidance on setting up a similar system. If you would like to order a hard copy, please contact [publications@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:publications@ahdb.org.uk) or call: 0247 799 0069.



## BREEDING SHEEP FOR RESISTANCE TO PARASITES

Breeding sheep that are more resistant to worms presents both a challenge and an opportunity. For over a decade, Signet recorded flocks have selected sheep based on low faecal egg count (FEC) EBVs. These breeding values have helped to identify sheep that put fewer eggs onto the pasture and may require less frequent drenching.

FEC can be a challenging trait to assess in the individual animal and in recent years, AHDB has supported research to look at new ways of assessing resistance to internal parasites. Research from the University of Glasgow has shown that antibody responses against the larval stage of a strongyles infection can be used as a biological marker for host response to infection. High levels of immunoglobulin A (IgA) have been shown to regulate both worm growth and fecundity, leading to a decrease in egg output.

In 2020, AHDB funded Lleyn, Romney and Exlana breeders that record with Signet to assess IgA

levels in the blood serum of around 4,000 lambs. Preliminary results are encouraging and indicate the trait has a heritability value around 30%, suggesting considerable promise as a tool to breed more resistant sheep.

For more information, visit: [signetdata.com/technical/genetic-notes/breeding-for-worm-resistance-a-technical-update/](https://signetdata.com/technical/genetic-notes/breeding-for-worm-resistance-a-technical-update/)

### Finding the latest information on parasite control

AHDB funds SCOPS and COWS – industry-led groups that aim to provide evidence-based, sustainable strategies for parasite control in sheep and cattle. We have recently worked with SCOPS, HCC and QMS to provide an updated guide – Worm control in sheep for Better Returns – available to order in hard copy.

COWS has published a new technical guide which offers ideas of how different strategies for individual parasites can work together. It includes two helpful beef specific

scenarios looking at spring and autumn calving.

Visit [cattleparasites.org.uk](https://cattleparasites.org.uk) and [scops.org.uk](https://scops.org.uk) for timely parasite control advice for cattle and sheep.



## New Medicine Hub launches

Antibiotic resistance in humans and animals is considered to be a global health threat. Irresponsible use will reduce antibiotic efficacy and risk untreatable health conditions of both humans and animals. To use antibiotics responsibly, the first thing we need to do is to know how much we are using, when we are using it and why we are using it.

The Medicine Hub is an electronic recording system for cattle and sheep farmers to record antibiotic use on their farm. If farmers don't already record their use electronically, there are two ways they can start to use the Medicine Hub – the farmer themselves can do it or their vet can do it on their behalf (with the farmer's permission). For farmers already recording antibiotic use via other electronic means, AHDB has methods for importing that data – again only with the farmer's permission.

Recording antibiotic use for all food producing animals is increasingly being demanded by consumers. Knowing what we use, why and when will allow us to demonstrate that our livestock production systems are using antibiotics responsibly.

By recording antibiotic use, farmers will be able to monitor the health of their livestock. Changes on farm can alter the health status of animals, for example implementing a new vaccine protocol, changing housing or implementing other management changes. It's important to know what the effects of those changes are on the health of our animals. Regularly reviewing antibiotic use with your vet will allow you to

understand the dynamics of health on your farm, prevent some diseases taking hold and protect the health of your animals. It will also play a role in demonstrating that the industry as a whole is using antibiotics responsibly – something that will differentiate UK production from other countries and competitors.

To access the Medicine Hub and for information and guides on how to get started, visit: [ahdb.org.uk/medicine-hub](https://ahdb.org.uk/medicine-hub)

We also have a friendly team of advisers to help you. Call: **0844 335 8400**.

“Recording antibiotic use for all food producing animals is increasingly being demanded by consumers. Knowing what we use, why and when will allow us to demonstrate that our livestock production systems are using antibiotics responsibly”





# Maximising grass growth to reduce **WINTER FEED BILLS**

**AHDB Strategic Farmer, Steven Lawson, who farms with his father, Alan, has improved year-round grazing quantity and quality on their upland farm in Northumberland.**

Employing the help of a grazing mentor and investments in fencing have paid for themselves. Steven said: “By following a rotational grazing system and being strict with closing paddocks in the autumn, we have grown more grass and had higher utilisation. We’ve achieved savings of £2.65/ewe in silage fed and reduced the amount of cake used by 80%.”

Autumn grazing management at South Farm centres on ewe body condition. At weaning, when lambs average 100 days old, ewes which are below target body condition score (BCS) graze the highest quality grass. Whilst those on maintenance or above target can be used to tidy up paddocks, allowing other paddocks to be shut up and to build covers for tugging.

Planning starts early, as Steven explains: “In May, I start thinking about which paddocks need to be shut first to provide high quality sheltered grazing for the ewes at lambing in the following spring, whilst building covers on the drier land to provide deferred grazing for the ewes over winter.”

With last autumn being mild, some paddocks were grazed down to 1,500 kg DM/ha (4 cm) at closing in September. These paddocks performed particularly well this year, with big improvements in sward quality – analysing at a metabolisable energy (ME) of 11.2 MJ/kg DM and 17% crude protein (CP), offering the ewes fresh grazing post-scanning in January. The farm had 600 kg DM/ha more pasture cover compared with January 2020.

Deferred grazing was trialled for the first time last year on permanent pasture, with covers built up to 2,600–3,000 kg DM/ha. Ewes were moved every two days.

However during a period of poor weather the paddocks started to look messy. With the help of a visit from a grazing mentor, the ewes were switched to daily moves and the situation improved with paddocks being grazed down well. Steven monitors the impact of changes on farm through collecting data using EID. And despite the initial challenges of the deferred grazing, there was no detriment to scanning percentage or ewe BCS.

Steven has increased his farming business by more than double, now extending to 307 ha of mixed ground. On the new block of land, fields have been split from 20-acre down to 10-acre paddocks using semi-permanent fencing. With an investment of £3,000, this is already proving beneficial, reducing the distance driven to check and move stock by 24 km/day.

## STEVEN'S GRAZING TOOLKIT

- Sward stick – measuring every two weeks
- Planimeter GPS area calculator app to measure fields and plan rotations
- 3-in-1 electric fencing reels
- Advice from grazing mentor
- AHDB discussion group membership
- Winter grazing and feed plan produced with consultant

“I’d strongly recommend joining groups, going to look at other farms and not being afraid to ask for advice. It has been very beneficial knowing I have help at the end of the phone if things are not going to plan.”





## NEW RECOMMENDED GRASS AND CLOVER LISTS

Nine new varieties have been added to the Recommended Grass and Clover Lists (RGCL) for 2021/2022, which is a table of suitable grasses and clover for growing in England and Wales.

The lists are an invaluable resource for grassland farmers, enabling them to select varieties that will perform well in their particular system. The RGCL includes one white clover, one *Festulolium* grass and seven new varieties of ryegrass. The varieties are rigorously tested for factors such as total and seasonal yield, feed quality, disease and persistence before making it onto the lists.

Your free copy of the RGCL is included in this issue and is also available online at [ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/recommended-grass-and-clover-lists-rgcl](https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/recommended-grass-and-clover-lists-rgcl)

## NEW AHDB GRASSLAND PROJECT LAUNCHES

Grass is the most important, yet often overlooked, resource for livestock production. Well-managed grassland provides the most economic feed throughout the year, either as grazing or conserved forage.

The grassland project has launched and will run for five years. It will support beef, lamb and dairy farmers by helping them to utilise their grass to its full potential. Focusing on both growing and using more high-quality grazed grass will reduce dependence on purchased feed and in return improve farm net profit, as well as having a positive impact on the environment.

Graham Parks, a dairy-beef farmer from Macclesfield, encourages farmers to learn more about grassland management and find out more about AHDB's grassland project. He said: "The benefits of growing and utilising grass properly are huge as it's the most nutritious and economical crop to grow."

More information can be found at [ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/grass-forage-management](https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/grass-forage-management)



# RAMCOMPARE – showing the value of high genetic merit rams

RamCompare is the UK's commercial progeny test for terminal sires. We have recorded the performance of 26,000 commercial lambs sired by over 280 rams over five seasons. Data relating to progeny performance is used by Signet to enhance existing estimated breeding values (EBVs) and within research to develop new ones for traits like days to slaughter and carcase conformation.



## RAMCOMPARE HAS SHOWN:

- The EBVs produced by Signet are generally good indicators of progeny performance on commercial farms
- Abattoir derived data can be used to produce new EBVs. Where these are available to commercial ram producers they are extremely valuable
- Ram buyers can use existing breeding values with confidence to select more profitable rams

The commercial value of traits will vary from farm to farm, but by selecting individuals with the right combination of EBVs, producers can identify the most profitable rams for their business.

### For example:

- High scan weight EBV = increased growth rates and reduced days to slaughter
- High scan weight/muscle depth EBVs = increased carcase weights
- Superior muscle depth/gigot muscularity EBVs = enhanced carcase conformation
- Fat depth EBV = good indicator of the fat classification achieved by sire progeny



## Genetics in action on RamCompare farms

Even in the best growing season, Ian Robertson faces a race to get lambs finished from his May lambing flock at Chawton Park, Hampshire. Easing the grazing pressure through faster finishing makes life easier, particularly in a dry season and ultimately means fewer lambs that require expensive finishing.

RamCompare data has shown important differences in the progeny by different rams, with those by sires with superior breeding values for days to slaughter finishing earlier than others on test. The ram with the best breeding value for days to slaughter being a Hampshire Down bred by Jim Birkwood from Thorbeck – whose progeny were away nearly three weeks ahead of the flock average.

The speed with which lambs are finished off organic clover leys is also extremely important to Duncan Nelles, from Thistleyhaugh, Northumberland. In 2020, 852 lambs produced an average carcase weight of 18.6 kg at 102 days of age. However, the most interesting differences in this year's RamCompare data related to the genetic merit of his rams for carcase conformation.

Over half of the lamb crop routinely grade U or better – but some sires far exceed this benchmark. Top of the list was a Charollais bred in the Foulrice flock and owned by Andrew and Jan Walton. He ranked highly in Signet's evaluations for lean meat yield and gigot muscularity, with over 90% of his progeny achieving the top two grades.

These genetic benefits add up. The average financial gain on these farms was an extra £5/lamb. Over a ram's working lifetime, this is easily worth an extra £1,200 per ram, simply from selecting the ram with the right EBVs.

## How to find the best rams

Finding the sheep with the superior genes for growth is easy – grab some scales and start measuring them. If you head to a ram sale and get the biggest, you've probably found the vendor with the biggest feed bucket. But within your own flock you won't go far wrong in selecting lambs for daily liveweight gain and adjusting your data depending whether lambs were reared as singles or twins.

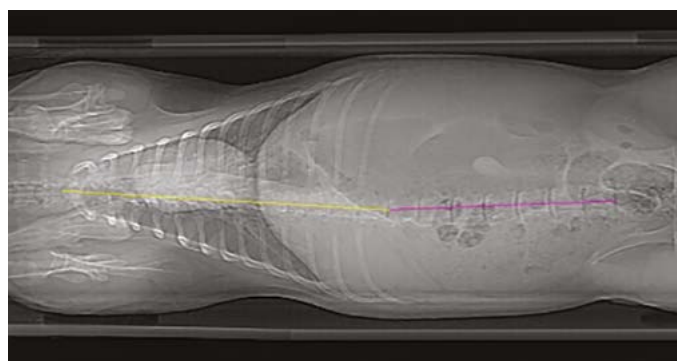
Improving carcase attributes is a different matter, as objective measurements in the live animal are far harder to collect. The most cost effective technology is the ultrasound scanner, measuring muscle and fatness across the loin. AHDB continues to be a pioneer in the development of these services and the accreditation of ultrasound technicians, supporting the measurement of over 40,000 lambs per year.

In the late 90s, AHDB used levy funding to develop the use of a new tool for assessing carcase merit, the CT (computed tomography) scanner. CT provides a welfare friendly way to assess the total muscle, fat and bone yield in a live sheep using X-ray image analysis. This near perfect predictor of carcase composition can also measure spine length, vertebrae number and intramuscular fat percentage, as well as muscling in different parts of the carcase, such as the gigot.

CT scanning improved our understanding of the relationship between on-farm ultrasonic measurements and the lean and fat yield in the carcase, showing the importance of each tool in increasing carcase yield.

Every year AHDB supports the CT scanning of 250–400 of the country's leading ram lambs, identifying elite males for wider use within Signet's Terminal Sire Breeding programme.

Faster rates of genetic gain, mean that commercial producers can identify more profitable terminal sires with improvements in carcase quality expressed throughout the supply chain.



## Locating the best rams

There are 5.7 million records included within Signet's national evaluations and all of them are freely accessed online. Over 50 years of performance records are only two clicks away through the new Signet website, which can display the leading genetics in any one of 30 different breeds.

However, what commercial producers really want to know is:

- Which rams are for sale?
- What is their genetic merit?
- Where are they located?

Within the new Sheep for Sale section of the Signet website, we can answer many of these questions – with a number of breeders listing rams that are for sale on this free to use page. Signet's Flock Finder helps you locate your nearest Signet recorded flock.

With the help of Signet, when it comes to finding a terminal sire, it's never been easier to identify the best rams or to locate them. Visit: [signetdata.com](https://signetdata.com)



# MATERNAL MATTERS – providing a much needed focus on the female

**Productive genetics are at the heart of any suckler enterprise, but over the years we might have been guilty of focusing too much on the finished animal. It's easy to see why, when changes in the finished animal can be seen on-farm or on the kill sheet. These terminal traits are relatively quick to change and explain.**

**It's harder to explain and demonstrate change on the maternal side, focusing in on females, but it's an area that requires greater attention. Maternal improvements in productivity are worth five times more in the long run than improvements in the slaughter generation.**

“Price per head is visible, but not important... Fertility is invisible, but very important” – Sarah Pick, 2020 Nuffield report.

The average suckler producer in England is losing £135 per cow before subsidies, which is unsustainable long term (AHDB, 2016). This is due to our relatively high cost of production – partly because of the high standard in which we raise our cattle and partly because of production inefficiencies to which we have arguably not paid enough attention over the years.

Heifers account for 10% of the cost of production. Calving at two is commonplace in the rest of the world to:

- Minimise cost of production
  - Increase lifetime productivity
  - Improve longevity
  - Reduce the carbon footprint of beef
  - Average age at first calving in England is 32.8 months – nearly nine months later than the rest of the world
- Only 82% cows produce a calf each year – problems are mostly linked to cow fertility and calf mortality. Again, the UK is lower than the rest of the world

The AHDB Maternal Matters campaign aims to impact on these statistics with a series of activities starting in autumn 2021 and running until October 2023. The campaign will deliver key messages through a range of channels assisting suckler producers to:

- Understand their cost of production and how to reduce it
- Use maternal genetics and herd data to breed replacement heifers that have the genetic foundation to become productive and profitable suckler cows
- Develop heifers to successfully calve at two years old
- Focus on post-calving management to ensure she produces a calf every 365 days for the rest of her productive life

Maternal Matters is different to what we usually do. We're going to tell a story and follow the production cycle from choosing stock to breed replacements from, to getting that replacement in the best place to calve her second calf by three years of age.

The Maternal Matters campaign will help farmers understand how we can improve maternal genetics within the suckler herd and why it is important, whilst also helping producers identify the management and selection practices required to enable greater suckler cow lifetime performance and profitability.

Maternal Matters launched on 6 September, keep an eye out for webinars, podcasts and social media activity. For more information, please contact Sarah Pick at [sarah.pick@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:sarah.pick@ahdb.org.uk) or Emma Steele at [emma.steele@ahdb.org.uk](mailto:emma.steele@ahdb.org.uk)



# Maternal Matters

*Promoting the production of heifers that are  
efficient, profitable and fit for the future*

Find out more at: [ahdb.org.uk/maternal-matters](https://ahdb.org.uk/maternal-matters)

#MaternalMatters

## HEIFER management



For more information on heifer management, check out our new updated guides, manuals and webinars.

### Publication:

- *Breeding, selecting and managing beef replacement heifers*
- *Suckler breeding planning sheet*
- *Herd notebook*

### Webinar:

- Replacement heifers: the foundation for a profitable suckler herd
- Replacement heifer development: lessons from Nebraska
- Strategic Farm: heifers – to breed or to buy?



# Getting your farm business **FIT FOR THE FUTURE**

Duncan Wyatt, lead livestock analyst from our Market Intelligence team, tells us how farm support is changing and how you can access help.



**No one needs reminding that the UK's relationship with the EU changed on 1 January 2021. While some uncertainty is behind us, there is still plenty of change ahead.**

There have been immediate effects of the UK's exit from the EU. Beef and lamb trade in both directions has fallen. Although nothing like the changes we could have expected in the event of no deal, in the short term we face higher costs associated with additional paperwork such as Export Health Certificates and more customs checks. These costs will affect trade both ways and could pass along the supply chain, with an eventual impact on farm gate prices, which are strong at the moment. But some export trade may have been lost indefinitely.

Leaving the EU allows the UK to strike its own trade agreements, with free trade agreements with the USA, Australia and New Zealand in the pipeline. All are big agricultural exporters. So, if new FTAs bring greater access to our markets, it will be the marginal cost of production of imports that will set prices here. While there may,

of course, continue to be some cross-subsidy through environmental schemes, only producers that can compete on a short-term marginal cost basis will be best positioned. Long term, businesses need to recover their full cost of production to remain viable.

Price, convenience and quality are the key drivers for consumers and set their actual purchasing priorities. This is why the debate over farming standards is so important, as higher standards almost always come at a higher price. Now the UK can sign its own free trade agreements, the differences between international production systems will come under more scrutiny. World Trade Organisation rules have much less to say about methods of production than they do about the final product itself, and some countries even argue against country of origin labelling.

## **Farm support is changing**

It's not all about how consumers consume and will be guided by a philosophy of 'public money for public goods'. An agricultural transition period will be in place in England from the start

of the year to help farmers plan for the new arrangements. The standout element of this is the seven-year phased reduction in direct payments. These payments offer a level of security to farm business income, amounting to 61% of profitability across the board, although it differs by sector. AHDB's Business Impact Calculator can help you understand the scale of some of these changes, and plan to be fit for the future: [bic.ahdb.org.uk](https://bic.ahdb.org.uk)

Although in the short term the overall level of support available could be the same, the amount of money distributed will also depend on environmental scheme design and uptake. Understanding on-farm costs of production and returns at the margin have never been more important. If livestock farms are going to be paid to produce environmental products, how much will this be in addition to, or at the expense of agricultural output? If environmental schemes cannot reconcile food production with environmental outcomes, farmers will need to become adept at maximising profits from their farms, even if this means some tough decisions on output.



# Virtual events showcase UK beef to the USA

Coronavirus has resulted in worldwide disruption, not least for exports. With restrictions on international travel, AHDB's Exports team had to quickly adapt to a new environment and uncover new ways of ensuring that our beef and lamb products were still at the forefront of importers' minds.

The USA is a key target market for beef exports from the UK, so the team decided to showcase high quality beef with a series of virtual events that began in May 2021.

The events included cooking demonstrations by celebrity chefs including Luke Rhodes, who appeared on last year's *MasterChef: The Professionals*, as well as award-winning Stoke Park chef, Chris Wheeler.

These online events allow AHDB, with support from Red Tractor, to showcase the high quality and high standards of red meat from the UK. Plus the events allow AHDB to continue making important connections within the export markets during a time when a physical presence at shows has been challenging.

The events will continue through to November, aimed at different target markets in the USA, including California, Illinois, Florida and Texas.

In line with coronavirus restrictions lifting, the Exports team hope to be back at physical shows soon to showcase the quality of beef and lamb from across the UK with the potential to open new markets.

For more information and to stay up to date with AHDB's export activity, visit: [ahdb.org.uk/exports](https://ahdb.org.uk/exports)

“These online events allow AHDB, with support from Red Tractor, to showcase the high quality and high standards of red meat from the UK production systems are using antibiotics responsibly”





# EDUCATING THE NATION'S CHILDREN on all things food and where it comes from

AHDB's funded education schemes reached more students than ever over the past couple of years as the nation took to home learning in response to the pandemic.



Nearly one million (876,857) educators downloaded just over 2.2 million free resources and recipes from the Food – a fact of life (FFL) website. Delivered in partnership with the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), the programme aims to continue to highlight the importance of food and nutrition education, with support for teachers across the UK.

Elsa Healey, senior education manager at AHDB, said: "School closures last year helped boost the education programme. We are delighted to see both teachers and parents making use of the huge breadth of content, as well as teachers benefiting from a range of online training available. We will continue to provide resources that not only keep children interested but also keep them learning about how their food is grown, reared and produced."

Industry-wide initiative Countryside Classroom, which is headed up by Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) and backed by AHDB, was also well visited. There was a 77% increase in new users last year, with over 158,000 people making use of the educational resources on the website.

AHDB partners across industry have rallied behind Countryside Classroom, with 32 different organisations committing their support. Last year, the project reached 3.6 million people, benefiting from an appearance on *Countryfile* and appearing in a range of online articles, as well as social media support from industry.

Roz Reynolds, head of education at AHDB, said: "It's not very well known within industry that AHDB hosts, funds and supports an array of education programmes and initiatives. AHDB continues to support the nation's educators in providing evidence-based information about food and farming to school children.

"To enable our future generations to make informed decisions about the food they buy, cook and eat, an understanding of farming, food production and its role within a healthy diet is really important."

For more information and to check out the resources for yourself, visit:

[foodafactofliafe.org.uk](http://foodafactofliafe.org.uk)

[countrysideclassroom.org.uk](http://countrysideclassroom.org.uk)

[burgerbuilder.ahdb.org.uk](http://burgerbuilder.ahdb.org.uk)



# Successful We Eat Balanced campaign returns for a second helping

Following a successful pilot campaign, which saw several AHDB sectors collaborate for the first time, the We Eat Balanced consumer marketing and advertising campaign returned this autumn.

Aimed at those consumers who were considering reducing the amounts of meat and dairy they eat and drink, extensive evaluation shows how the pilot campaign has helped to shift the attitudes of these consumers, compared with before the campaign aired. Following the campaign, more consumers felt red meat and dairy could form part of a healthy balanced diet and more people understood that red meat provides a range of vitamins and minerals.

Liam Byrne, Head of Marketing at AHDB, said: "The pilot really showed us the power and influence of social media and so that is where we focused our efforts this autumn. We knew we needed a presence on social media, as this is where our core audience of shoppers who are reducing, or thinking of reducing, their meat and dairy are receiving lots of misinformation about British food and farming."

"We also know that consumers trust in farmers and their role in food production remains robust and the campaign built on that with a focus on producers sharing their stories about how they farm and their role in maintaining our landscape and environment".

Make sure to check the AHDB website for the latest updates on the campaign at [ahdb.org.uk/marketing](http://ahdb.org.uk/marketing)



## #FireUpForSummer barbecue campaign success

AHDB's summer marketing campaign encouraged Brits to elevate the standard of their lockdown barbecues. The digital campaign inspired consumers to use premium cuts, showing off the ease and versatility of cooking with beef, lamb and pork steaks on the barbecue. Specially created guides, videos and live cook-alongs from expert barbecue pitmasters on our consumer-facing websites and social channels inspired cooks to bring new flavours and recipes to this much-loved meal occasion.

With the easing of coronavirus restrictions, barbecues offered a great way to bring families and friends together. Indeed, 2020 saw the biggest annual rise in barbecue occasions – up 44% year-on-year. This amounted to 100 million barbecue meals during summer 2020, with experts predicting the trend will continue.

Messaging was targeted at different levels of cooking experience, with tips on how to get the best out of different types of barbecues and cuts of meat readily available.



Barbecue lovers across the country were reminded over the summer that no matter their level of expertise, anybody can put together a tasty and stress-free barbecue.

The digital and social media campaign ran from 17 May through to the (30 August) bank holiday and included National BBQ Week from 5 July to 18 July 2021.

Videos, recipes and more campaign-related information is still available, for this, visit: [simplybeefandlamb.co.uk/blog/bbq-recipes](http://simplybeefandlamb.co.uk/blog/bbq-recipes)



# NEWS & UPDATES

## DEAR DIARY

Our events are back on farm! Make sure you book your place today at [ahdb.org.uk/events](http://ahdb.org.uk/events)

## 2017 Strategic Farms

- 19 October** – Johnny Haimes, Devon
- 11 November** – Joe Howard, Nottinghamshire
- 30 November** – Guy Prudom, North Yorkshire

## Challenge Sheep

- 2 November** – Phil Pearse, Devon
- 17 November** – Rob and Anna Hawke, Shrewsbury

## Webinars

- 18 October** – Introducing cattle into arable rotations to ‘beef’ up the profit
- 4 November** – Heifer replacement strategies: Cost reduction in the UK suckler herd
- 11 November** – Selecting KPIs for livestock systems
- 15 November** – Sheep Breeders Round Table
- 6 December** – Why and how to select for maternal traits (Maternal Matters)

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](http://ahdb.org.uk/events)

## PUBLICATIONS AND MANUALS UPDATE

- *Recommended Grass and Clover Lists* (included with this issue)
- *Breeding, selecting and managing beef replacement heifers*
- *Improving cattle handling for Better Returns*
- *RamCompare Project Results 2021*
- NEW Autumn closing worksheet
- NEW Clover stick – use this to assess the percentage of clover in your pastures

To order your copies, use the form on our B&L homepage: [ahdb.org.uk/beef-lamb](http://ahdb.org.uk/beef-lamb)

## HOW ARE WE DOING?

We're constantly striving to improve Ruminant News and would love to know more about the bits you love (and any you don't!). We have a short, multiple choice survey which we would appreciate you completing so we can learn more about the topics that interest you the most and make the biggest difference to your business.

Please visit: [bit.ly/RNfeedback](http://bit.ly/RNfeedback) to complete the anonymous questionnaire.

## UPDATE YOUR DETAILS TO KEEP IN TOUCH

We no longer send event invitations by post. This is to help reduce costs so your levy can be spent on valuable projects, publications, research and marketing activities.

Make sure you don't miss out by ensuring we have the correct contact details for you.

- Do this online by visiting: [ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch](http://ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch)
- By phone by calling: **024 7647 8694**
- Or by post: **CRM team, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2TL**

