

Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breeders' Association

Looking Ahead

2009 - Edition No. 23



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Spring 2009

Office News



Ear Tagging 2009

This year the Association Council of Management has approved the supply of double tags. For the £4.50 Lamb Registration fee, members will receive the usual button tag **and** a loop tag. Both will be marked with the lamb's UK individual ID. The button tag will also be marked with the Bluefaced Leicester pedigree identification.

Association Database

All last years Registered lambs have now been entered on the Database. This has been extra work for the Office Staff, but due to Matt and Elaine taking over the production of the Magazine, we have had that time to keep up to date with the data entry. As normal there is a deluge of Registration Forms received over the Christmas and New Year period, but the entry was completed by the end of January. Timing was important as the information of the 2008 lamb crop could then be extracted from the Database and sent electronically to the Flock Book Printers. Members and non-members can view the animals on the database, and the 2008 Flock Book should be with you soon.

The information from the database was also used to make up some of the Sales Catalogues in 2008. This procedure may be made more use of in years to come, but would require members to 'pre-register' lambs to be sold at Sales entry time. Look out for that one in the future! (As a pay-off, closing dates for Sales entries could be made nearer the Sale time).

Gift Aid

In Autumn last year the Association finally received permission from the Inland Revenue to allow us to treat members as donors in respect of Membership Subscriptions. This is a scheme for Registered Charities only. This claim is being back dated to 2002, so the amount claimed back was considerable. If you did not send back your completed form at the end of 2008, **please complete the form enclosed NOW and return it to the Association as soon as possible – it is not too late!** This is of no cost to members, and will provide a very useful financial input into the Association funds.

And Finally.....

I would like to thank the members of the Association for their friendship and support during my four years as Secretary. I hope you will continue that support with the newly appointed Secretary, and may I take this opportunity to wish the Association and its members the best of fortune in future years.

Jean Gibbon, Secretary.

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Bluefaced Leicester

Sheep Breeders' Association

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Front page -

Bluefaced Leicesters in Romania

Contents - Editorial

From The Chairman	4
From The President	5
Flock Features	6-9
Scrapie Genotyping	10
Signet Recording	11
Female Sales Reports	12, 14
From the Vice-Chairman	16
Blues in Romania	18-19
Regional News	21-22

Adverts

Blackface Breeders Ass.	17
Carrs Billington	9
Dalton	19
Harrison & Hetherington	4
Hawes Auction Mart	15
Hexham and Northern Marts	13
Innovis	IFC
Intervet	16
Lawrie & Symington	13
McClelland, J & Sons	15
North Cheviot Society	BC
North Of England Mule Sheep Ass.	BC
Penrith Auction Mart	13
Ritchey	5
Scotch Mule Association	BC
Swaledale Sheep Breeders Ass.	22
Walleys Marts	15
Walton, M	7

Farming

Full Of Ups & Downs

Farming is full of ups and downs. In the back end, when we were struggling with tup prices and breeding sheep weren't so hot, how many of us thought that we would get more for our tail end lambs than we got for our best ones. The beef trade has also been good along with suckler calves and breeding stock, and I have also heard that the first sales of ewes and lambs have been good - so long may this continue. On the down side I have just had another letter this morning telling us that our milk will be 2.2p down, backdated to the 1st of April, and that the money I had invested with them has been turned into shares so that it doesn't show as a debt on their balance sheet. Normally when something is in short supply the price goes up but with milk it seems to be working in reverse. (So much for being a dairy farmer!).

On a different note, in February we managed to export 15 tups to Romania. Thanks must go to Arthur and Sid for sourcing the tups, the vendors for doing all the tests and a special thanks to Sid for transporting them down to Southampton and getting them safely on the ferry.

A friend told me that from January to when you retire is the easiest part of being National Chairman. So I thought I was on my homeward stretch, when in January our Secretary Jean handed in her notice, this completely threw my homeward stretch into turmoil. We had to firstly advertise the post and then the applications were posted to me. After the closing date we organised a F & G P meeting to discuss applications and decide who to interview. We then had to organise a day in which we had all of the interviews which again was a steep learning curve for me as I have never had to do anything like this before. So I was pleased it wasn't just me. After the interviews two candidates came in very strong, so I had to go and get references for the two girls and we organised a telephone conference to discuss this. Still we were undecided so it was decided that myself, Phil the vice chairman and Jean would visit the girls at home and report back on another telephone conference. This sounds easy but to start with Jean, Phil and me live a long way apart and the girls in question also lived three hours apart. We put in a long day and eventually after another conference it was decided to offer the post to Helen Carr who up until now has been working at Hexham Auction Mart. She will be working from an office rather than home and the office will be at Carlisle. So I hope you will all



Nicky Robinson

make her very welcome when she starts work. At this point I must thank all the council members who turned up for the meetings as this was in the middle of lambing and I know it was extremely difficult for all of us to get the time and I must also thank Jean who has been trying so hard to help us find the right person for the job and make the transition go as smooth as possible. Now that the position has been filled it has been like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders and I can now get on with some of my own work without having this at the back of my mind all of the time. I am sure all the council members involved will feel the same.

All that remains for me to say is good luck Helen. I hope that you are very happy working for the Bluefaced Leicester Society, and also to say from myself and the Society a very big thankyou to Jean - I hope you have a very long and happy retirement. Also a big thankyou to all members who have helped me during my time as chairman.



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Quality Is The Key

As I sit down to write my President's report on the year and keep a watchful eye on the lambing shed, it is hard to believe another year has gone by, and lambs are being born again. Doesn't time fly when you are enjoying yourself.

The highlight of my year was being asked to judge Bluefaced Leicesters and Mule sheep in America: this turned out to be one of the best experiences of my lifetime. My wife Jane and I set off from Edinburgh Airport on 4th September and flew into New York Airport, an 11 hour flight, a bit daunting as it was huge, so big you have to get bused to your check-in terminal. Everything is big in America. Then we had another two hour flight to Madison where our hosts Brenda and Mark Lelli met up with us and looked after us.

On the Saturday 6th September, we were driven to Winconsin where the two day show was being held. I then judged the Bluefaced Leicester classes and on the Sunday I judged the Mule classes. During my choice of placements of classes I was handed a microphone to give a commentary on why I had placed them in that order. I'm not sure they understood the Scottish accent. The sheep breeders were very interested, which was reflected in two hours of being bombarded with questions, and people could not have been more friendly.

On the Monday we woke up at Brenda and Marks house in Mitchigan six hours from the show, a most beautiful house and surroundings. Jane was most impressed with the livestock guard dogs that live all the time out in the field with the sheep, protecting them from predators. Monday evening we flew back to Edinburgh arriving back to rainy Scotland on the Tuesday morning, a very tired and shattered couple, but what a great experience it was. A big thanks to Brenda and Mark Lelli, and we hope to show them around the Royal Highland Show in June.

After arriving home from America, bags unpacked and repacked, it was off to



David Cruikshank

Kelso Ram Sales where I had the task of judging the Bluefaced Leicesters. There was an excellent show of shearlings which was reflected in a very good steady trade. Quality will always sell well. The year ended with a very enjoyable social night at the Bluefaced breeders dance at Hexham, recommended to all breeders.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my year as your President, travelling a lot of miles, viewing the countryside on the way to shows, open days and meetings. We are in worrying times as the UK sheep flocks keep on declining, and worrying for Bluefaced breeders as there is not as many of us going to be needed.

Therefore, it is time for us as breeders to be more selective in our rams and ewes, numbers are not everything and certainly not bigger margins. Quality is essential.

An advertisement for Ritchey Manufacturing. The background features a stylized Union Jack flag. At the top left, the word "RITCHEY" is written in large, bold, red letters. Below it, the text "Manufacturing British Tags for British Farmers" is written in blue. In the foreground, there are several yellow sheep tags. One tag is a ring with the number "UK230011" and the letter "I". Another tag is a circular disc with the number "700" and the letters "W L 2 1 1". A third tag is a circular disc with the number "05021" and the letters "K L 4 P". In the bottom right corner, there is a small circular logo with the word "RITCHEY" and "EST. 1972" below it. A red banner in the top right corner says "We're EID ready when you are". At the bottom, the website "www.ritchey.co.uk" is written in red.

The Myfyrian's



(L to R): Myrfyn, Jayne and Gareth



Gareth and Phil May (Derwenlas flock) with their 2008 R. Welsh Interbreed Pairs winners

Under the brooding presence of the Snowdonia mountains isn't maybe the place you'd expect to find one of the more noted flocks of Bluefaced Leicester's, but this is where you can find the Myfyrian flock built up by past president and chairman of the Association, Myrfyn Roberts and wife Jayne. Admittedly Snowdon is across the Menai Straits, but its sheer bulk is still dominates the skyline from Anglesey where Myfyrian Isaf is located.

Myrfyn's great grandfather moved to Myfyrian Isaf at the end of the 19th century and Myrfyn's father bought the main farm in the 1950's. Myrfyn and Jayne are helped on the farm by 20 year old son Gareth, who works full time on the farm after completing an agricultural college course at a local college and his twin sister Bethan who is training to be an occupational therapist, who likes to get her hands dirty when back on the farm, especially helping with Jayne's Hunter horses. The holding now runs to some 450 acres, with around 300 owned and another 150 acres rented from a neighbour, and has just over 80 head of suckler cattle plus followers, including 12 pedigree Limousin cows which are Gareth's pride and joy, as well as lambing 1000 ewes. All the stock is finished on the farm, the cattle sold fat at between 25-30 months and the lambs as soon as they are fat.

Central to the sheep system which has been developed on the farm is the Bluefaced Leicester, which as well as providing the purebred sheep, with some 60 ewes in the Myfyrian flock, they produce all their own replacements, crossing around 120 Beulah ewes with the Leicester ram and retain the gimmers for their own breeding. The Mules are then crossed primarily with the Suffolk and a few to the Texel to provide top quality, quick finishing lambs, half of which are sold fat before the end of June. Some of the better Suffolk X gimmers are also retained, and are crossed with the Texel.

By being so self contained it has allowed the farm to make best use of the genetics of the Leicester's as there has been quite some investment in performance recording the flock, in association with Signet.

www.blueleicester.co.uk

The recording helps to track the lines with the best weight gains and size, which also follows through into the breeding flock by using the better genetics which equates into faster lamb finishing. "It's not the be all and end all of selection" says Myrfyn, "but if you can use the data provided to suit your system it is a good tool for flock improvement"

Although they don't sell any Mule gimmers they do still try and breed good quality Mules, and even took the Mule champion at the Welsh Progeny Show several years ago against some stiff opposition. Showing stock is an important part of the shop window on the farm. Although they don't show at many shows, their name is synonymous with prestigious championships, taking the coveted red white and blue ticket at the Royal Welsh for the last four years, three times with one ewe, sired by the £6400 T4 Carryhouse, affectionately known as "Lanky Larry" and the year before her first victory it was her mother. Nothing like keeping it in the family! Last year saw an added bonus as the ewe was part of the pair which took the Royal Welsh Interbreed Pairs championship at the UK's, if not Europe's, premier sheep show. She has taken the breed championship at the Anglesey show three times in succession too, as well as taking the progeny show championship too. It's the type of ewe you get once in a life time, and whether she will be out to show again it remains to be seen...always a good thing to retire at the top!

When looking for a tup Myrfyn keeps a strong emphasis on conformation and size, as well as being good on the legs "They can't do their job if they can't get about". As well as keeping the traditional type there is a crossing line too in the flock, which is used on the Beulah's. Current tups include the Y8 Wellan ram which was assessed as Elite+ and last year a Midlock lamb (A5) by the noted Controversy tup joined the ranks, and his first lambs are looking good so far.

Gareth is keen to keep the family tradition going and keep striving to keep the farm moving forwards and meet future challenges head on.

Flock Story



Three times winner of the Royal Welsh Show sired by the £6400 T4 Carryhouse

A Beulah ewe with her lambs

At the moment the market is looking for the crossing type, and they can see that side of the flock developing more, but still keep in sight the tradition of the breed of tall, well built correct sheep which are fit to serve the sheep industry for many future generations.

Outside of farming both Myrfyn and Gareth were disappointed with the latest rugby result, with the Irish winning the Grand Slam on Welsh soil, but at least it wasn't all doom and gloom, as Myrfyn pointed out, "Liverpool walloped Man Utd, so that's good". Gareth wasn't just as happy about that for some reason...



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Hundith goes from



L to R: Michael, Jack and Adam



Y1 Midlock purchased in 2006 in partnership with David Abberley and Ken Jones

The term living legend gets bandied about all too easily these days, but surely that can't be far from the mark in the case of Jack Lawson, one of the characters within the Bluefaced Leicester breed, and a star draw when selling his stock at the auction, which is always entertainment value in itself, drawing banter from both the rostrum and the spectators alike.

The passion for Leicester's started when Jack bought three gimmer lambs at Carlisle as a seven year old, some sixty years ago, and he has been breeding them since, initially at Hundith and for the last 25 years at Kirkland Green near Wigton, and over that time has produced some great top quality tups with great reputations, including last year when he sold to a top of £11,500 and saw his lambs, all by the same sire, Y1 Midlock, top the sales at three separate sales.

Kirkland Green sits alongside the busy A595, running to around 1000 acres in several blocks and carries 1200 lambing ewes comprising of 820 Swaledales which are crossed with the Leicester and a further 100 which are run pure. There are also 200 Texel and Texel cross ewes. The farm also carries 120 suckler cows and followers with both Limousin and British Blue cattle, pure and crossbred. 500 Mule gimmers hoggs are lambed and sold as gimmer shearlings as well as finishing 3-4000 store lambs on keep over winter, which are sold at Penrith and Carlisle. It is a big workload, but Jack is ably helped by sons Adam, 28,

and Michael, 25, and his wife Eileen, who claims that Bluefaced Leicesters are costing her sanity, but Jack says she loves doing the book work really.

The current flock of 34 lambing Bluefaced Leicester ewes can trace their roots back to some ewes that Jack bought from Bob Eilbeck of the Banklands flock in the mid sixties and more specifically recently to a ewe which was saved in 2001 when the Hundith flock was decimated from a flock of 60 ewes to 1 remaining ewe and 7 gimmer lambs. Over half the flock are now related to one of these gimmer lambs, which was itself out of a ewe that had bred a tup lambs sold to



Jack was the 2008 winner of the Helme Trophy, Greenop Trophy and the J R Bell & Son Trophy

strength to strength



A Swaledale ewe and her lamb



Hundith flock in their home surroundings

the Haining House flock for £600 and did such an outstanding job. It was sold for £4200 as a seven shear, such was its reputation.

Since the Foot and Mouth Disease of 2001 the main job has been selecting the right bloodlines to carry on the reputation that was effectively sent up in smoke, and get the flock back on a decent footing without compromising the crossing qualities of the flock. Jack has always concentrated on the crossing ability of his sheep, looking for the right bloodlines and correct sheep to go with them. Before any tup is used on the Leicester ewes, it has to prove itself with the Mule side, which Jack believes helps to keep the breeding right. "No use using a tup on the pure yowes that doesn't do its job properly on the crossing yowes" he notes. One tup which is clicking big time is the £8500 Y1 Midlock which Jack bought at Hawes a couple of years since along with David Abberley (Old Hemley flock) and Ken Jones (Lawson flock). Jack sold nine lambs last year at three centres and averaged well over £3000 with them, selling to some noted flocks. He is clicking well with the ewes by a Kentmere tup which was used after the Foot and Mouth, and maybe goes to show the recovery from 2001 is nearly complete.

Strangely, for a noted Mule breeder, Jack doesn't do well in the Mule gimmer lamb sales. The fact is, he sells all 500 Mules as gimmer shearlings at Carlisle, Penrith and Lazonby, generally picking up tickets at them all and has topped at £205 for a champion pen at Penrith, which is a record in Cumbria for shearlings.

With all that has changed in agriculture over the past few years and also within the breed, it is good to see the familiar things not changing, and Jack is certainly a character within the breed who remains larger than life, and who we all maybe have something to learn from,

even if it just knowing what to quip in the ring to draw a few extra bids!. One thing is for sure though Jack won't be resting on his laurels as he feels there is always room for improvement. There must be, as every year he sells a lamb that is "Best he's ever bred".



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Scrapie



Innovis

keep a check on it

Innovis



Eurion Thomas

With uncertainty over the future of scrapie genotyping following the closure of the NSP many breeders will be asking if it is worth continuing with genotyping from now on. We must remember that the NSP has achieved what it set out to do – which was to reduce the incidence of scrapie in the national flock. The reason that funding has ceased for the NSP is because the risk of BSE being present in sheep and consequently a human health risk is now found to be negligible.

We must not forget that scrapie is an animal health problem and provides a considerable threat to flocks as a disease in its own right. It is difficult for breeders / flock owners who had never seen or maybe even heard of scrapie pre-NSP to be convinced of the merits of the work involved with breeding towards scrapie resistance. Flocks that have had scrapie have successfully used breeding for resistance to decrease / eradicate the disease. When genotyping was first available through VLA, Weybridge in 1994 it cost £120 per sample! We should be thankful that free testing has been available recently.

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Why should you keep breeding for Scrapie resistance

- Scrapie cases have fallen dramatically since the start of the NSP programme. Don't take your foot off the pedal now – do you remember the days when scab was under control in the UK?
- Even though pressure is off on the human health issue – it is still a serious sheep disease.
- Progress has been made regardless of the lack of interest from ram buyers. Just because your customers may not be interested shouldn't mean you don't continue to work with us to control this threat to the sheep industry
- There are many sheep farmers out there who have had a problem with scrapie in the past and will not want to buy susceptible stock.

Export of sheep

The current economic climate has made exporting of sheep an attractive option and there has been interest from abroad for Bluefaced Leicester and Mule Sheep. Before animals can be exported they must either be part of the Scrapie Monitored Scheme or Type 1 genotype (ARR/ARR) so breeding for resistance remains essential for these purposes.

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The alternative

Even though the NSP has finished breeders can still genotype their sheep by using Innovis' commercial genotyping service from Cellmark. ScrapieCheck™ is the most robust and reliable scrapie test available and has been the mainstay of our DNA testing services for the last seven years. Cellmark is the lab that was used by the NSP for the majority of its scrapie testing and it has high quality assurance standards.

Innovis has agreed a discounted testing rate to members of the Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breeders Association. The prices for 2009 are given in the table below.

ScrapieCheck™ prices – cost quoted on a per sample basis.

Batch size	Normal price (excl. VAT)	Discounted price (Excl. VAT)
1 - 10 samples	£18.00	£15.00 (saving of £3.00 per sample)
11 - 29 samples	£14.00	£12.00 (saving of £2.00 per sample)
30+ samples	£9.00	£9.00

Last year we introduced a new sampling technique which enables farmers to sample the sheep themselves meaning there are no additional veterinary costs.

What should you do?

- Ensure as a minimum that any males intended for breeding are tested.
- When ordering your kit from Innovis quote your membership number so that we know you qualify for the discounted rate.

Scrapie resistance is still an important factor in the future of sheep breeding regardless of there not being a risk of BSE in sheep. However we can now take a more balanced approach making use of Type 1, 2 and sometimes type 3 sheep (unless of course scrapie is a problem in your flock).

During this period of uncertainty do not drop the use of scrapie resistance in your breeding strategy. Concentrate on the positives that have resulted from the NSP and ensure that we continue along a sensible road to maintain a resistant national flock without forgetting the other important attributes of sheep.

For more information about ScrapieCheck™

or to order your testing kit - Call us on 01970 828236 or email us at enquiries@innovis.org.uk www.innovis.org.uk

Time For Change

*“Look abroad through nature’s range.
Natures mighty law is change.”*

- Robert Burns 1794

In these turbulent times, the one thing that is certain is that things change. Change manifests itself in one of two ways, you can change with the times and prosper or you can be a victim of change and diminish.

In the past, things changed to benefit the Bluefaced Leicester but is this still the case now? The Bluefaced Leicester Breed and its associated Mule progeny, once the backbone of the sheep industry, are under threat from many breeds and crosses. Ample proof of this is the reduction in numbers at most Mule sales. If this trend continues then our breed will undoubtedly suffer, less Mules means less Bluefaced Leicesters. The stakes are high because our breed provides the link between the hills and low ground producers. Through the stratification sheep system, the whole sheep industry has benefited for many years, in the production of hardy, profitable breeding ewes and has ensured that funds flowed from low ground producers to the uplands and hills. What would be the future for hill sheep or Bluefaced Leicesters if there were no Mule sheep?

In this technological age, science plays an increasing role in agriculture. The livestock industry has incorporated technology into breeding systems for poultry, pigs, dairy and beef cattle. For sheep we now see commercial buyers paying a premium for performance recorded terminal sires. The time approaches when such records will also be required for other crossing breeds. For Bluefaced Leicesters to prosper we must concentrate on all aspects of the breed from promotion to producing the right type of sheep for the modern market. I, like others, like to breed good-looking sheep, but at the end of the day, looks only provide an identity. If the breed or cross does not perform, then ultimately it will be a victim of change and diminish.

A proven principle in business is “start with the end in mind”. In terminal sire breeds the end product is easy to evaluate so breeding for performance is relatively straightforward. With Bluefaced Leicesters, the end product is more complex and a variety of extra traits such as longevity, milking ability and mature size come into play. While this complicates the picture, it is not a reason for avoiding the issue! The results of the Longwool Project have produced a template for future



Derek Hall

improvements in the breed and a mix of carcase traits, mothering ability and longevity will produce meaningful benefits to the Bluefaced Leicester breed and associated Mule breeds. Whatever the situation, a concerted effort from breeders to embrace performance recording can only benefit the breed. Improvements in carcase traits and longevity will not only bring profit to the breed and the industry but it will also give us something to market. Glossy magazines and stands of prize winning animals will do nothing to secure the breed’s future in the long term but good animals with performance to back them up have got a better chance.

There are many objections to performance recording but most fall into categories of excuses such as “it is too much work” to “my flock is too small”. The extra work amounts only to weighing lambs around eight weeks as well as scanning and weighing at 21 weeks. The other information such as tugging and lambing details should already be collected. Smaller flocks can become involved by purchasing or sharing high index rams from larger flocks and benefit from improved genetics.

Progress in performance is cumulative and no matter what market is being catered for, breeding for performance benefits all. Slaughter lambs will grow faster and kill out better while the ewes will milk better and last longer. Each breeder has a choice, continue to do nothing or look to the future and utilise every tool at our disposal to keep our breed abreast with the changing market.

The choice is yours, performance recording is complex and produces a vast amount of facts and figures which can be hard to understand at first but this should not deter breeders because it will bring meaningful benefits in the future.

Sam Boon at Signet or one of the existing members will be only pleased to help with any queries.

Midlock tops Carlisle female sale



Top priced female from Midlock

A packed ringside braved the elements to attend the annual Carlisle Bluefaced Leicester in lamb sale, which saw a good trade. Whilst not quite up to last years dizzy heights for a single sheep, on the whole trade was excellent with 14 lots going above the 1000 gns mark and saw averages soaring way above last years trade.

Topping the trade was a gimmer from the annual consignment of gimmer shearlings from J Wight & Sons, Midlock, which were greatly admired for their conformation and depth of breeding and saw five lots into the four figure bracket. Their top bid was for a gimmer by the N25 Nunsleugh and carrying twins to the £17,000 V3 Bull & Cave. The successful bidders were David & Val Hill from Whitewalls, Great Asby, forking out 2400 gns for the privilege of taking her home. Midlock had a bid of 2000 gns for another gimmer by the W25 Midlock Controversy and in lamb with triplets to X1 Riddings, sire to the Midlock £10,000 lamb last backend, which sold to Ian Gregory, Slacks Dale Farm, Derbyshire.

The reserve champion came from W M Hutchinson from Redgate, Kirkby Stephen, with an in lamb gimmer, the first that has ever been



Gimmer sold for 2,000 gns

sold off the farm so it was a chance to buy into some deep genetics. She is by the W1 Keer and carrying triplets to A1 Hewgill bought last backend for £11,000 from M/s Lord. She was knocked down to P J Broughton, Wash House Cottage, Whitby for 1900 gns.

Following on from their success at the Hawes sale the Lords from Hewgill flock took the championship ticket again, with judge Neil Marston picking out the twin sister to the champion at Hawes. It caught the eye of the judge from Hawes, who was the under bidder to its sister on Saturday and was knocked down for his son, Walter Sutcliffe who is starting out with his own flock with the Mought prefix, for 1800 gns. John Kerr from Craigskean enjoyed a good day out too, with a set of twins the highlight, with both making 1800 gns. They were by the Z1 Firth and out of a ewe by V1 Ty-Gwyn, and sold over the water to noted Northern Ireland breeder, Robert Loughbridge.

Averages :

**6 Ewes £582.75, 36 Gimmers £660.92, 19 Lambs £837.24.
Drinkstone Flock – 7 head £123.00. Walton Flock – 28 head
£224.63**

Ballymena Female Sale

Bluefaced Leicester female sale was a small entry with quality lots selling in demand with the crossing type clearing easily and the traditional type finding it hard to find new homes.

In the pre-sale show judged by Richard Graham, Tullyvallen taking champion was a ewe lamb from the flock of Colin Coulter, Carrick Rock

This stylish coloured lamb is out of Carrick Rock Z10 by Ashcleugh X10 and her dam is by Ashcleugh V15 this top crossing blood line was backed up in the sale ring when she went on to make top price of the night at 1250 gns to the Mullaghwee flock of Michelle Wright.

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Also from the same flock saw the second top price of the evening a ewe lamb with the same blood lines selling on to Brendan Blaney, Tievebaile farm for 800 gns.

Reserve champion of the show went to McCormick Bros, Brablagh for a very smart one crop ewe by Ewanston X2 in lamb to Aughafoy Z2 and went on to sell at 250 gns to Mr Brown.

Prizewinners - ewe lambs - 1-and champion - C Coulter, Carrick Rock, 2-S Laverty, Orra View, 3-C Coulter, Carrick Rock
Ewes - 1-and reserve champion - McCormick Bros, Brablagh, 2-McCormick Bros, Brablagh, 3-G Peters - Drumee Farm



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Hawes Female Sale Peaks At £3,000

On a bitterly cold January's day it was fitting that there was a red hot trade at the Hawes Bluefaced Leicester in lamb sale. Averages jumped overall by well over £200 for more sheep sold to level out at £693 for 39 sheep forward. The biggest gain was in the gimmer shearing section with averages up by about £350.

Topping the days trade was a gimmer lamb from M/s Lord, Hewgill with a cracking gimmer lamb by K1 Lunesdale and out of a ewe by V45 Hewgill. The judge, Phillip Sutcliffe pushed the bidding all the way but couldn't match the resolve of Scottish breeder Robert Wallace from the Macherquhat flock, Ayrshire who landed his target for £3000. The Lords completed a great one – two as they took the reserve ticket too, with a gimmer lamb by the prolific V45 Hewgill. This lamb is the full sister to Z14 Hewgill that the Lords are using within their own flock, and proved irresistible for George Shields who took it back home to tarn House, Ravenstonedale for £2200.

Robert Wallace, who is building up his flock, was back in the thick of things only a couple of lots later purchasing from the Kirkby Redgate flock of W M Hutchinson & Son, forking out £2800 for a gimmer lamb by the Y25 Hewgill out of a W1 Keer ewe, the same breeding as the Redgate male champion and £8000 tup lambs from last backend's sales.

John and Claire Mason, Oddacres, enjoyed a succesful day selling their 4th prize Z7 Smearsett sired gimmer lamb in an £1800 deal to R & P E Hargreaves & Sons.

Top price in the in lamb section went to W A & A Booth from the Smearsett flock when they sold a gimmer shearing by V37 Lunesdale and carrying twins to the top priced lamb from last years sale, the £11,500 A1 Hundith. The buyers were M/s Willoughby, Woodend Farm, Redmire.

Show Results :

Ewes and Gimmer Shearlings: 1-J Caton £450 to J Millman, 2-A Caton £600 to D & H M Watson, 3-A J Mason £450 to D & H M Watson

Gimmer Hoggs 1st and Overall Champion - M/s Lord £3000 to R Wallace, 2-and **Reserve Champion** M/s Lord £2,200 to G & H R Shields

Forward 39 Sheep Overall average £693. Gimmer Hoggs to £3000 Av £966.



Overall Champion and top price female



Reserve Champion female from M/s Lord



Female sold for £2800 from W M Hutchinson

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Thursday October 1st

Annual Prize Show & Sale of 950 Registered Bluefaced Leicester Rams & Females for the Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breeders' Association. Judging 7.30 am. Sale 9 am.

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An Honour To Be Chairman

As your incoming chairman I have been asked to introduce myself to you. I am writing this on the 1st of March (St David's Day); the weather is warm, dry and sunny with the first daffodils starting to bloom and the first lambs just born.

"Perhaps" this is the start to a better year than the previous few.

I run a farm, "Gornal", with my family in Four Crosses, in the county of old Montgomeryshire which is now part of Powys. It is in the Severn valley not far from Welshpool which has the greatest through put of sheep in the country.

A pedigree herd of Holstein/Friesians has been milked here for almost 60 years and we have been lucky enough to win both National and Regional Herd Competitions on many occasions. Lots of bulls are sold annually; we are renowned for cattle of tremendous width and substance, a policy which we try to implement in our Bluefaced Leicesters.

I have judged over 200 shows world wide, my proudest moment being Judge at the European International Show in Brussels.

My interest in cows has involved me in the Holstein Friesian Society, being North Wales Board Member for ten years, becoming a non-executive director, its chairman, and at present being their President elect. It will be very interesting being your Chairman and their President at the same time, giving me the opportunity to visit many shows etc throughout the UK.

Enough of cows!

Bluefaced Leicesters became a new passion in 1998 when the first ewes were registered. Welsh Mountain and Beulah ewes are predominant in our area and therefore the traditional type of Leicester has been kept in the flock due to its great demand. However, due to some customers wishing to try the crossing type, my wife Sue has started her "Healthy" flock to suit their requirements as it has always been a policy, whether cows or sheep, to breed what the commercial farmer desires.

Female lines from some of the top flocks in the country have been purchased. Heavy culling plus the use of a Beltex ram on the bottom 20% of the flock has been practiced to attain the flocks' present status, with the majority of rams and females being sold at home.

Phil Davies



Group of ram lambs by Mossvale Masterplan

We have a logo "better not bigger, wider not taller, built to last, bred to stay".

With this in mind rams have always been selected within such criteria - width, good teeth and a robust constitution being the main characteristics. Rams which have been used with these attributes are Gornal Goliath (Elite Plus), Mossvale Masterplan (Elite Plus, semen being collected for export to USA) and two new young sires, with lambs presently being born, Clennel Commander and Burndale Bluemoon.

It will be a huge privilege being your Chairman but remember the Association is there for the good of its members, so if you have any queries or concerns please feel free to give me a ring at any time.



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Publicity Update

By now everybody is well into lambing and admiring lambs by tups old and new. At this time of year your publicity committee has been considering and implementing ideas to help members to market their stock at Autumn sales.

Last year, we combined our stand with the Scotch Mules at the Royal Highland Show and the North Of England Mules at the Great Yorkshire Show. This proved to be a great success and will be repeated again this year.

Events for 2009 have been discussed with prominence made to "North Sheep", where the brand name **"UK MULE"** will be launched. This is an unique opportunity for us as it is being held at the farm of John Stott, our incoming President.

Bluefaced Leicesters have to be promoted in a different manner compared to other breeds of sheep, for example Texels, Suffolks or Beltex who are competing for a share of the same market. The more they promote their breed the more tups they sell at the expense of their competitors. The majority of Bluefaced Leicester tups are crossed on hill ewes, and so there is a limited number of tups that can be sold. The only way we can increase the price we receive for our rams is to promote the MULE, hoping an increased demand for MULES will be passed back to Bluefaced Leicester breeders.

The UK MULE brand will enable the Bluefaced Leicester Association to promote the great attributes of the MULE such as ease of management and unrivalled financial output. Many Mules in the UK are not represented by an Association, so this will give them the opportunity to be promoted as well as the ones already promoted by their own Mule Associations. A meeting was held with various Mule Associa-



Mule with her lambs

tions, who were enthusiastic about this great idea. We feel that it is very important to involve them as much as possible and we appreciate their valued input. We hope as many members as possible will support this launch on June 3rd 2009.

Stand space has also been taken for Welsh Sheep on 19th of May, South West Sheep on the 9th of June and at the Northern Ireland Sheep Event on 6th July.

The rams sold to Romania have arrived safely and we hope that this will provide good promotion. The potential export market to Romania is enormous and we will be promoting the Blue there throughout this year.

The show season will soon be upon us and I wish you all much success and fun with your sheep! **See you all at the UK MULE launch on the 3rd of June and join us for a glass of bubbly.**

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Romanian Blues....

The Blue Revolution

Eastern Europe is generally associated with the Red Revolution which took place in the early part of the last century and cast its long shadow over Europe until the late nineties, suppressing its people and to a large extent its agriculture too.

But now things are different, and a new dawn is breaking. A Blue Revolution is taking place within agriculture in Romania, with a consignment of 15 Bluefaced Leicester rams to the country, following the successful importation of several others last year. The sheep industry in Romania may never be the same.

The Bluefaced Leicester has been the backbone of the British sheep industry since the mid sixties when the popularity of the Mule as a breeding sheep really took off, and now the breeding flock of the ever popular Mule stands at around 45% of the UK breeding flock, making the Bluefaced Leicester one of the most influential breeds in the country.

One great advantage in the Eastern Bloc countries that have recently joined the EU is the fact that the state sees agriculture as a real way of moving the country forwards and are very keen to develop this. And, with a rich, fertile land, it is easy to see why many people feel that over the next decade or so Eastern Europe will become one of the main players in the world food chain. Farmers are receiving direct subsidy for their produce, receiving around 60 euro/ for uncultivated land and 120 euro/ha for cultivated land and a headage payment for livestock over six months old of 10 euro/sheep and 150 euro/cow. This has seen land prices jump in Oradea from 100 euro/ha to well over 1000 euro/ha and well over three times that in the more fertile places as the country moves towards a 21st century agricultural industry.

In 2007 a contingent of Romanian farmers were invited over to North Sheep in Weardale where they saw how the stratified system of www.blueleicester.co.uk



Sid Ivinson (centre, back) with Anca and Michael Demian (left, back, Front right) and workers with one of the new BFL rams in Oradea.

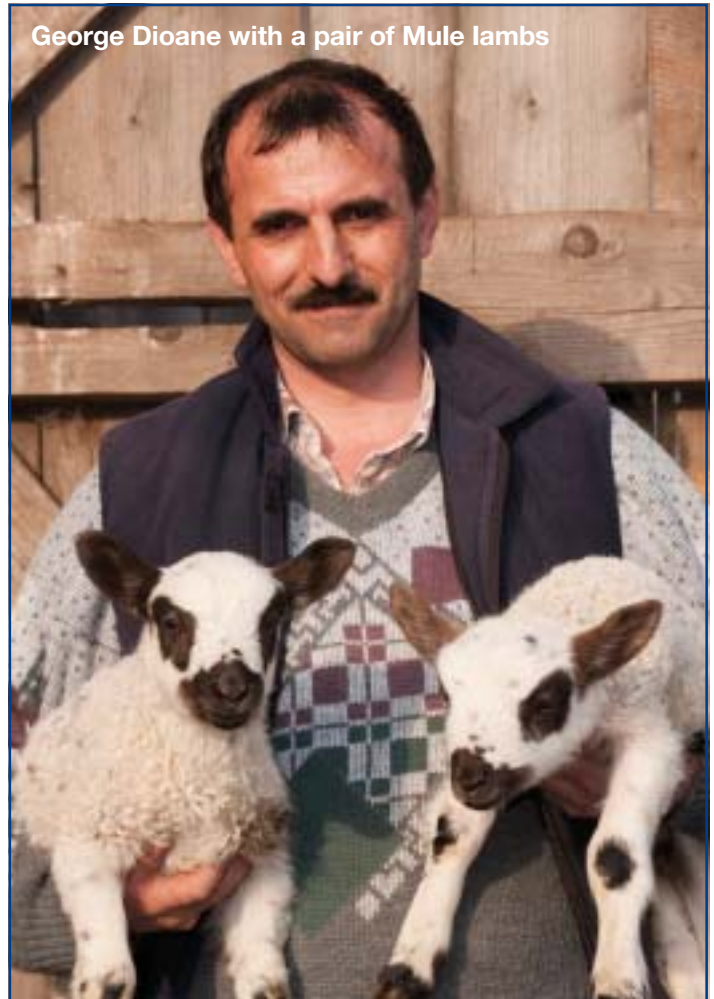
sheep production worked in the UK and how it could fit well into the Romanian sheep industry. This followed on from the Bluefaced Leicester Association's successful show at the Indagra Expo in Bucharest in 2006 which was followed up again in 2007, igniting real interest in the breed. The then Association chairman, Sid Ivinson was over in Bucharest and was pleased with the initial reaction out there. "The language was different but the language of farming was the same...they could see the benefits of the Mule sheep and how they could benefit from this"

Since the initial contact there have been a couple of individual exports, but last year an order was placed from a sheep association in Timisoara on the Hungarian border for 15 rams, which were handpicked by the Bluefaced Leicester Association from willing breeders and sent over this spring. The forms to fill and the red tape was an eye opener to the breeders, but eventually with the help of Mike Adams in Bristol, who has extensive experience in exporting the deal was signed and the sheep delivered.

The tups, from all three home countries, were placed in quarantine for a month before being distributed to the farmers who purchased them. One of the shepherds who has taken home some tups is George Dioane, who imported two rams last year and used them on his flock. He was pleased with how the tups did, initially putting the two rams with 400 ewes for a month and then replacing them with some of the traditional rams. So far, about three weeks into lambing he has around 200 lambs, and is impressed with the vitality of the lambs and the improvement in the conformation over the traditional Turcana, which fill a similar niche to the Swaledale or Blackface ewes in the UK.

George runs one of the largest sheep flocks in Romania, with around 2300 breeding ewes on 280 ha around Timisoara and as Chairman of the Timisoara shepherds group has quite an influence on the direction of the sheep industry within the country. When he visited England in 2007 he saw the real benefits of the Mule ewe and was determined to try and recreate the system back home in Romania. "Our sheep need to improve to compete in Europe" he said. "The emphasis on sheep breeding in Romania for many years has been for milk production as opposed to meat" This is now changing, and demand is growing in nearby European states, with buyers coming from Greece, Italy, France and Turkey and taking the lamb straight off the farm at around 12 weeks old for between 1.6-1.75 euro/kg up to around 2 euro/kg for the lucrative Easter market.

The ideal scenario is to retain the Turcana breed for its milkiness and the Leicester for its prolificness and then cross the resulting Mule gimmer with the Hampshire, Texel or Suffolk sires to produce the commercial lambs, much like the system in the UK. There is a lot of work to be done and many hurdles to clear before the vision becomes a reality, but with food on the international agenda and the fertile grounds of Romania, it is possible that the six million strong sheep flock of Romania could be on the very edge of a true Blue Revolution.



George Dioane with a pair of Mule lambs



Blues heading for Romania

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Welcome to our new Secretary



Helen Carr is from a successful Northumberland farming family. Her father David farms at Highwood Farm Hexham, with her brother David, where they have sheep, beef cattle and a livestock and grain haulage business.

She has worked at Hexham Mart since leaving school and has seen the mart move from its site at Maidens Walk to Tyne Green where Hexham has become recognised as being one of the top marts in

the country today. Helen has had contacts with the Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breed through her work at Hexham having been responsible for helping organise sales at Builth Wells, Kelso and Hexham.

She enjoys Point-to-Points and is entries secretary for the Haydon Point to Point, and also enjoys playing golf and visiting historic cities

in the UK. Helen lives at Barrasford near Hexham with her partner Robert who is a livestock buyer based in the North East of England.

Helen is looking forward to the challenges of being the Bluefaced Leicester Association Secretary, and with the current buoyant sheep trade considers the breed will be prominent in the future of the British sheep industry

Helen will be working from our new office in Carlisle, starting on Monday 11th May : The Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breeders Association Office, Riverside View, Warwick Road, Carlisle CA1 2BS

Please note the office will be closed Monday 4th May to Friday 8th May (inclusive) to allow for relocation. The new phone number will be advertised on the website.

Due to an error the following sheep were not in the £1000 list in the last magazine.

Price	Eartag	Vendor	Purchaser
£1,365	1411/Z30	J E & S J L James (DUHONW)	B C Dallyn, Killington Farm, Devon
£1,155	1736/Z3	J Williams (DAN-YR-EPPYNT)	G Davies & Co, Pantglas, Trecastle, Brecon
£1,838	3114/Z24	S A Harding (SHREWBRIDGE)	N & J Taylor, Moscar House Farm, Sheffield
£1,365	1183/Z27	M C & G Roberts (MYFYRIAN)	B J & D E Baker, Olives Farm, East Sussex
£1,050	4080/Y16	H P Havill (MARTIN GRANGE)	M/s Robinson, West Cocklaw, Hexham



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2009 Spring Regional News

Northern Ireland

Chairman: Seamus O'Kane, 61 Slane Road, Carnlough, Ballymena, Co Antrim Tel: 028 28885911

We held our female sale in January which had a small entry. These were hard to get cleared unless they were of the coloured variety. The champion and top priced female came from Colin Coulter, Carrick Rock at 1250 gns for a ewe lamb.

The Annual General Meeting was in early February and the main topics being our forthcoming sales. The dates were sorted and a show of hands was used to confirm which type of ballot was to be used. It was voted to remain the same. We received an invite from the NSA to attend and support a sheep promotion day in July and it was decided it would be a good idea to take two pens to accommodate both the stand and sheep. We also will be taking the stand to our Royal Ulster (Balmoral) Show. It was also decided to have a change of venue for our dinner dance which will now be held in the Ross Park Hotel, Ballymena on Saturday 28 November 2009.

Myself and Michelle attended the dinner dance in Hexham in the excellent company of Jimmy and Wendy Bell, Stuart Park and Eunice Mills. The conditions proved to be a worry but on we went and an enjoyable evening was had by all, thanks to all for the hospitality.

Now like everyone else, thinking when will there be lambs by that new tup and what will they be like, wondering when we do get that length, what demand will there be for Bluefaced Leicesters.

I wish you all a happy lambing, an early spring, and look forward to a super 2009.
Best of luck.

North East

Chairman: Carl Stephenson, Pikestone, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham DL13 5RT Tel: 01833 631318

The first event of the New Year was the Female Sale held at Hawes Mart on 17th January. The forty sheep forward sold to a packed ringside after being judged by Mr P Sutcliffe who awarded the Championship to Messrs Lord's Gimmer Hogg, which later sold for £3,000 to R Wallace. The Reserve Champion was also a Gimmer Hogg from Messrs Lord which sold for £2,200 to G & H R Shields. The overall average was £693 - an increase of over £200 on the year.

We held our Annual General Meeting on 5th February and Robin Peart was elected as Vice-Chairman and I am most grateful for his support. J Porter, J Herdman, G Fairburn and O Scown were also elected on to the Committee, with David Brown retiring. I would like to take the

opportunity to thank David for all his time and work over the years and his invaluable contribution to the Association.

Next came the Dinner Dance held at Hexham and despite the awful weather, this was very well attended and a very enjoyable night was had by all.

Finally, lets hope all the bad weather is behind us - we get a Spring at last and a good lambing time, when all the snow of winter will be forgotten!

North West

Chairman: John Townson, Brook House Farm, Whalley, Clitheroe, Lancs Tel: 01254 824672

For the past two years I have been responsible for the NW Regional News in this excellent publication, where the reports from each region have always been optimistic for the future. My sentiments entirely – and I would like to think that the justifiable increase in our livestock prices over the past few months will be maintained, because there is now some appreciation that we produce quality food. However, I fear this is not the case as there is a worldwide shortage of food and with the country virtually bankrupt, the value of our currency does not have the same buying power to import. I just hope our end product prices are maintained long enough to include the breeding sales in the Autumn!

Now the Bluefaced Leicester matters. I was sad to learn that Jean will be retiring shortly from the post of very efficient Association Secretary. Somehow I can't see Jean being put out to grass, but she can always recall being acclaimed as an extremely fine ambassador for our Association, and thank her for all the help and wish her well for the future.

The female sale held at Carlisle in January had a good entry with the resultant trade being fairly selective. My own personal view is that we should encourage more in-lamb females to be sold at this time of year at this special sale as I think it will create more interest to members in upgrading flocks and maybe attract new members who can be in business within a couple of months. We in the north west area have the task of organising the Bluefaced Leicester stand and demo sheep at the forthcoming North Sheep Event in June being held at fellow member, John Stott's Laund Farm, Chipping. It is a great honour for John, Christine and family to be chosen to host this event, but it doesn't happen without a great deal of planning.

Regional News

We as sheep producers are faced with the unenviable task of having compulsory electronic identification forced upon us at the end of the year unless the EU are made to see sense and have the regulation scrapped.

The NSA and your Association will be voicing the protest quite vigorously, and it would be supportive if individual members could lobby your MP or NFU, and fight these unworkable sheep identification proposals. The frustration that is being heaped upon us by over regulation from Brussels, is really testing our tolerance to the limit.

The lambing season will be nearly over by the date of publication, and I hope that it has been fruitful without too much stress, and that we can look forward to the summer events with renewed vigour.

The date of our AGM in the north west region has been set for the 7th May at the Eden Hall Hotel, Penrith at 7.30 pm. Notices will be sent out but please put a note in your diary, as a number of important issues already highlighted in this review will be updated and discussed.

Wales & South

Chairman: Dewi Jones, Plas Pigot, Llansannan, Denbigh, Clwyd Tel: 01745 870246

Another year has passed and lambing is upon us once again and as I write the spring like weather is very welcomed after the cold start to the year.

We held our Annual Christmas Dinner at the Raven Hotel in Welshpool, the evening was a great success and well attended by members of the region.

The NSA Welsh Sheep which will be held on Tuesday 19th May at Cernioge Bach, Pentrefoelas, Betws y Coed. It's a one-day technical event and combines the opportunity for flockmasters to update on all the latest information, while enjoying a pleasant social occasion. Several thousand visitors are expected to attend. The Association will have a stand present and we look forward to seeing many of you there.

The South West Region will take a stand at South West Sheep on the 9th of June.

We are again holding our Progeny Show at Welshpool after the success of last years event and look forward to seeing an increased number of sheep entries.

The NSA Ram Sale at Builth will return to a one day fixture this year and will be held on the 21st of September. Confidence and optimism has returned to the sheep industry due to current finished lamb prices, let's hope that this will be reflected at the Autumn Sales.

Scotland

Chairman: Jimmy Bell, Whelphill Farm, Crawford, Biggar
Tel: 01864 502283

Ah!! spring we hope. A little heat wouldn't go a miss now the Leicesters have lambed, no complaints on the new tups yet, but haven't seen the Mules.

We had our stock judging night in February which was well attended and judged by James Herdman, where there was seven hundred pounds in prizes given out with the winner being Derek Hall. The tup hogg from John Kerr was voted champion.

Our AGM in 2008 was disputed for the way we appointed our Vice-Chairman Stewart Park. The Scottish Council members were then asked by the National Council to hold a meeting to sort this out, and as a result Stewart Park was voted Vice-Chairman – all a bit of a to-do about nothing really.

Thanks for your support at events through out the year and hope to see you all in the summer .

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2009 Diary Dates

- Welsh Sheep 19th May
- North Sheep 3rd June
- South West Sheep 9th June
- Royal Highland Show 25-28th June
- North Ireland Sheep Event..... 6th July
- Royal Show 7th-10th July
- Great Yorkshire Show 14th-16th July
- Royal Welsh Show 20th-23rd July

Progeny Shows

Penrith - Penrith Show 25th July

Closing date for entries is 9th July.

Ireland - Antrim Show 25th July

Closing date for entries is 26th June.

Wales & S. West - Welshpool Mart . 6th August

Closing date for entries is 23rd July.

Association Crystal Glasses presented to all first prize winners. Rosettes to 4th place in each class.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Please note that Entry Schedules for Penrith and Welsh Progeny Shows will be sent out from the Office to recent exhibitors. Extra forms can be downloaded from the website, or obtained from the Association office.

Closing dates must be adhered to. For the Progeny Show at Antrim Show, please contact the Antrim Show Secretary direct - Linda Davies - Tel: 028 90 849466

Junior Handling Classes At All Progeny Shows - Entries taken on the day

Ram Classification - Will take place at all three progeny shows - entries will be accepted on the day.

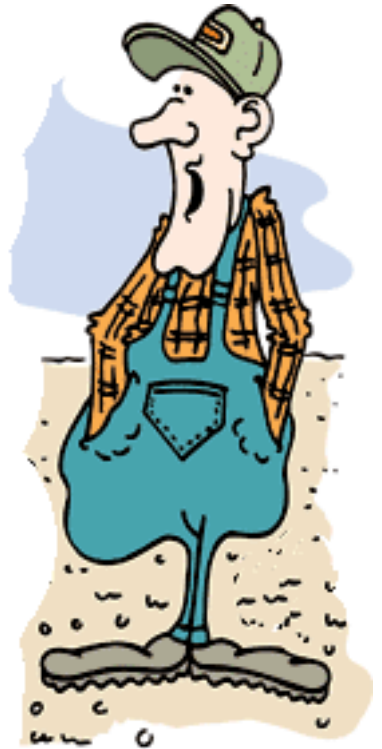
Don't let your guard down

What a cracking night! The most enjoyable Leicester meeting I've ever attended, everyone so positive, and such a good mix, young and old, blue and brown.

With all the business dealt with there's plenty of time for a natter and don't you love to compare lambing woe's. One scenario stands out, losing a good un, that tup lamb having one been identified as the pick of the bunch. His fate is sealed. Death stalks him in many guises - drowning, choking and flattening figure high.

Many of the aforesaid events triggered by the seemingly harmless act of answering the phone, a few minutes of chatter, can lower your guard, a coffee would be nice, half way down the cup there's the sudden realisation, a dash outside - too late! (I've just made a mental note, never phone anyone at lambing time, I could be cursed forever). Worthy perhaps of a David Attenborough documentary - here we are, not in the depths of the rainforest, or indeed high in the Tibetan plateau, but in a lambing shed about to witness one of nature's most predictable, yet most upsetting events! What's this? Someones licking my ear! What kind of meeting is this? I wake with a start, the dogs licking my ear and I've fallen asleep behind a straw bale. I've been dreaming, but the old ewes lambed her single. Could it be? No, it's a gimmer, never mind, I'll be able to go through the whole thing again in two years time.

Not so long to wait for the next Leicester meeting, though that's tonight. How will it go? Ah well, that will be another story.



Happy Joe

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Scotch Mule Association



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