

SHROPTALK



The Newsletter of the Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association

Spring 2019



We love our lambs! Just some of the lambing pictures posted on our “Friends of Shropshire Sheep” Facebook page, which now has 1,050 followers. Clockwise from the top left: Plump Hill Farm (Gloucestershire), Uwe Rutzen (Norway), Tregaminion Farm (Cornwall), Ifton Beech Flock (Shropshire) and Troutsdale Flock (Staffordshire).

THE PRESIDENT'S SPRING UPDATE

WELCOME to the Spring edition of *ShropTalk*. I expect most of you have finished lambing by now and I hope you've had some good results - the weather has certainly been kinder than in 2018!

It's never too early to start thinking about how to market your pedigree stock. We all have a number of options, including advertising in the farming press, on social media and also on specialist websites, such as “Sell My Livestock”. There will be just one National Show and Sale this year, and I hope that as many SSBA members as possible will support this on 28th July. We put a lot of effort into making it a showcase for our breed and a great opportunity to purchase top quality Shropshires. It's also a chance to meet up with other SSBA members and, once again there will be a social evening the night before with a

meal, a bar and pub quiz to entertain us. I hope to see many of you there!

Some of our members have kindly been out with the breed stand display on behalf of the Society to help promote Shropshires. We have another new display this year, which has been seen at two venues already. We are always looking for members to help at these events, and if you have any suggestions for places to promote Shropshires, please contact me or one of the other Council members with the details. Please be aware that volunteers are needed to carry out any extra promotional work.

The annual Flock Book has recently been published and sent out to members, and I would like to thank Alison Schofield for all her efforts in producing this for us. It is a very large and time consuming task.

I would also like to welcome Adrian Norton, who has agreed to become our Officer representing the Republic or Ireland. He takes over from Pat Delaney who stepped down at the AGM.

The Council is considering new ways in which we can promote Shropshires for meat production, both as pure-breds and as crossing sires. We have an interesting article in this *ShropTalk* about one of our members who is crossing a Shropshire tup onto Poll Dorset ewes with great results. Again, please let us know if you have information about similar cross-breeding successes that we could publicise.

Barry Hodson

TWO OUTINGS FOR OUR NEW BREED STAND

A new breed stand display, designed to highlight the attributes of the Shropshire that appeal to smallholders, has been used at Wonderwool Wales and at the Smallholding And Countryside Festival, both held at the Royal Welsh Showground in Builth Wells.

The breed society knows that there are several target markets for our breed and, with the help of Council Member Rosie Lee, we are designing marketing materials that are tailored to specific audiences. Council would like to thank Rosie for producing another striking display as well as Pippa Geddes (Wonderwool Wales) and Rob Kerby (Smallholding and Countryside Festival) for taking the stand and Shropshire sheep to the two events.



CHANGE TO SHOWING POINTS TROPHY RULES FOR JUNIORS

COUNCIL has decided that points for the Junior Members' annual showing trophy (the Hornpipe Quaiche) can now be claimed only for the highest placed sheep shown by the Young Member in each class entered. No points will be awarded for sheep shown by a parent or helper. This applies only to the Junior Members' Trophy.

EXPORT PRICES 2019

COUNCIL has agreed that prices will remain the same as in 2018, except that an uplift of £50 per animal will now be applied if buyers request females with the ARR/ARR (R1) Scrapie Genotype. Prices for males with the ARR/ARR genotype have been higher for several years and will remain as last year. The approved prices are the following:

Ewe Lambs £220 (or £270 for an R1)
Shearling Ewes £300 (or £350 for an R1)
Ram Lambs £420 (or £500 for an R1)
Shearling rams £520 (or £650 for an R1).

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Check out the latest news on our Facebook page: "Friends of Shropshire Sheep"

TARGETING THE PREMIUM EASTER MARKET WITH SHROPSHIRE CROSS DORSET LAMBS

THE Kerby family are looking for the most profitable ways to produce top quality meat lambs from forage alone. In their quest, they are making use of high genetic merit Shropshire tups, crossed with Poll Dorset ewes that will breed out of season.

The project began a couple of years ago, when Rob, Alison and their son Fraser decided to sell their flock of 60 mixed commercial ewes and replace these with Dorsets. The change of breed was Fraser's idea, and his aim was to lamb in the autumn and have finished progeny ready for market the following Easter.

Shropshires had been introduced to the Kerbys' farm near Usk in 2012 and they continue to run a pedigree, Signet recorded flock lambing in February.

Shropshires had quickly made a favourable impression as crossing sires on some of their commercial ewes and, as they had high genetic merit tups available, the family decided to use Shropshire rams alongside Poll Dorset rams in the new enterprise.

However, things did not immediately go to plan, due to the extreme weather. The first dozen or so Dorsets were purchased as in-lamb ewes in 2017 and the resulting ewe lambs and a couple of ram lambs were retained. Some purebred, unregistered Dorset lambs were purchased and these were inspected and Graded-Up so their purebred progeny can be registered. A further 28 pedigree Dorset ewe lambs were purchased, bringing the total flock size to 66.

CHALLENGES AT TUPPING TIME

In early 2018, the farm was badly affected by "The Beast From The East". This knocked back growth rates of the lambs and they were not forward enough to be put to the tup on the planned date in May. Tups were finally released in mid June, into three tupping groups.

Shropshire ram, Ushers Captain, was run with a group of Dorset ewes in a sheltered spot and tupped most of them. The other two groups of ewes that ran with Dorset tups were on much more exposed land that suffered from the very hot, dry weather. Tupping performance amongst these was disappointing - so essentially the crop of autumn lambs was down to Captain. He is a high genetic merit animal with a Terminal Sire Index of 266, putting him in the top 5% of the breed for growth and carcass traits.

The flock lambed in November and early December indoors with good results. The ewes



A pen of the Kerbys' finished Shropshire X Dorset lambs at Hereford market.

performed well on high quality home-produced small bale silage and minimal concentrate feed, and the birth weight of lambs averaged over 5kg. When lambs were around a couple of weeks old, the flock was turned out onto old permanent pasture, and ewes were fed rolls and fodder beet. The next move was onto a silage ley of Perennial Rye Grass and Red Clover, where lambs achieved excellent growth rates with no creep at all.

The first bunch of lambs went to Hereford market on 27th March, averaging 44kg and making £88/head. This was a little too heavy for the new season trade, so the next batch was sent at 36.5kg to the Easter Show and Sale and again averaged £88/head, but achieved a higher price per kg. Rob acknowledges that the prices would have been higher if the lambs had been Farm Assured, and this accreditation will be in place for the 2020 lamb crop.

"The very pleasing things were that the lambs had good conformation, and all finished in the target time frame - there were no stragglers," he comments. "What's more, we did some Faecal Egg Counting, and no wormers were required at all." The Kerbys are now refining their system and plan to tup earlier for two cycles, starting in the third week of May. Additional pure-bred Dorset hoggets have been purchased along with a Signet recorded Poll Dorset tup. They also plan to use one of their home-bred Shropshire rams - Cefn-carnau Endeavour, which has an outstanding Terminal Sire index of 306.



IMPORTANT CHANGES TO MV SCHEME RULES

PLEASE be aware that there have been some significant changes to the Maedi Visna Scheme rules. These have been put in place to protect the health status of accredited flocks.

TEST ALL ADDED ANIMALS

It is now mandatory that all animals added to any MV Accredited Flock have to be tested between 6 and 12 months after arriving, even though they come from an MV Accredited Flock.

The SAC, which runs the MV Scheme, strongly advises that added accredited animals are tested at the time they are added to the flock. Animals will need to be tested again in the 6 to 12 month window, to prevent a breach of the rules.

Any bought-in accredited animal that is to be sold on before its 6 to 12 month individual test on purchased accredited animals has been competed should be tested prior to sale and then subject to the 6-12 month test requirement once in the new flock.

CULL EWE SCREENING FOR NON MV ANIMALS ON THE SAME HOLDING

Furthermore, SAC says that MV infection in commercial flocks within the UK is increasing and this poses a major threat to MV accredited sheep. Non MV accredited animals kept on the same holding as MV Accredited sheep are a risk factor.

There is now a requirement for Scheme members with non MV accredited animals on the same holding to perform a cull ewe screen of 12 non MV accredited animals. The flock's veterinary surgeon should perform the selection of animals to be tested using the criteria on the submission form.

If infection is found in the non-accredited flock or the cull ewe screen is not performed the accredited flock will be classified as "high risk" and will have to revert to annual blood testing.

There are also further new rules relating to imported animals, semen and embryos. For a full set of the rules, please contact the SAC or visit the website www.sheepandgoathealth.co.uk. Failure to comply with these rules will lead to your flock reverting to annual testing. There are over 40 MV Accredited Shropshire flocks, so these rules will affect a significant number of our members.

NATIONAL SHOW AND SALE

THE National Show and Sale at Shrewsbury Market will now be the Society's only official sheep sale (see below). The date this year is Sunday 28th July, with a social evening the night before at Shrewsbury Market - put it in your diaries now!

Schedules and entry forms will be available shortly to download from the SSBA's website as well as Halls' (auctioneers) website. The closing date for Shropshire entries is 28th June. Once again, the event will be part of a larger Traditional and Native Breeds show and sale, involving other breeds of sheep, cattle, pigs and poultry.

Social Evening

The popular social evening and "pub quiz" for Shropshire breeders and other farmers will take place in the market canteen on the evening of Saturday 27th July. Tickets, which include food, must be purchased in advance. The price has increased slightly to £12 a head.

Please be aware if you are intending to sell sheep at this event that there are a number of rules and regulations that apply specifically to Shropshires. These are detailed in the schedule, so please read it carefully.

In addition to these requirements, please remember if you run an MV Accredited flock that there are some new MV Scheme rules that apply this year, when purchasing sheep (see the blue panel to the left).

We also have quite a few SSBA members who run Scrapie Monitored flocks, and this scheme has also tightened up its regulations. Sheep may only be purchased from other Scrapie Monitored flocks of the same status, unless the animal concerned is of the ARR/ARR genotype *and the genotype test has been carried out by the SAC, using a blood sample taken by your vet*. So, if you have R1s to sell, please bear this in mind to give yourself the broadest market appeal possible.

NEW THIS YEAR: The SSBA has donated prize money of £100 for the highest priced Shropshire Sheep sold in the ring, and this will be split 50/50 between the vendor and purchaser.



MELTON MOWBRAY SHOW AND SALE

A SURVEY was conducted earlier this year to ascertain members' views about the future of our National Show and Sale (East), which has been held in early September at Melton as part of the RBST's Traditional and Native breeds show and sale.

Some 44 members responded and the greater proportion of them hadn't been to the event because they felt it was too far to go. Many buy their sheep earlier in the year and don't like the fact that the show and sale takes place over two days, requiring an overnight stay. 42% of respondents said they'd rather buy their sheep at the Shrewsbury Show and Sale.

On the basis of the survey responses and dwindling support for the show at Melton over the past few years, Council has decided withdraw the designation of "National Show and Sale" from this event. SSBA Members can still take their sheep there to sell on the Saturday, but there is no showing class that they can participate in the day before. The SSBA will now focus all its efforts on the show and sale at Shrewsbury, and Council hopes as many breeders as possible will support this event, making it a highlight in the SSBA's calendar. A small prize was offered to members participating in the survey and this has been won by the Osmond's Flock - congratulations Fiona Wilson!

JUNIOR MEMBERS' NEWS

REGISTRATION REMINDERS

MEMBERS are reminded that all lambs *must* be Birth Notified with the SSBA within 90 days of the end of lambing.

Any females sold after they are four months old *must be registered with the SSBA*, even if they are being sold to a non-registered flock.

ROYAL WELSH

THE Royal Welsh Show Society has announced that it will no longer check the eligibility of sheep entries with breed societies before the show. The onus is now on the breeder/exhibitor to prove eligibility to show the animal and comply with both the Show's and the breed Society's rules.

PEDIGREE CERTIFICATES

PLEASE check your new pedigree certificates as soon as they arrive to make sure there are no errors.

Sometimes it is hard for the Registrations Clerk to read breeders' handwriting, additionally numbers can sometimes be accidentally transposed. Any errors can be corrected straight away but please do not leave it until the sheep are about to be sold!

CHANGES TO SIGNET EVALUATIONS

THIS year, Signet is re-launching the genetic evaluations for Terminal Sire breeds: The biggest change within the new analysis will be to move all the carcass traits from being age adjusted (current method) to weight adjusted. This means the updated Estimated Breeding Values will be a better prediction of carcass composition (muscling/fatness) at a fixed weight. As lambs are selected for slaughter based on a combination of weight and finish, rather than age, this will give a more commercial focus to carcass EBVs. This change will result in some re-ranking of Signet recorded animals within every breed.

A new analysis gives the perfect opportunity to introduce new traits. Signet will therefore be introducing a number of important carcass composition traits based on the results of CT (whole animal) scan images. There will be other commercially important traits too - including Birth Weight, Lambing Ease and Litter Size Reared.

All EBVs and indices will also be re-based to compare them with the average of sheep in 2010, rather than the average of when performance recording began (which is the year 2007 for Shropshires).

Members of the Shropshire Breed Improvement Scheme will be attending a special on-farm workshop in June at Sansaw Estate, by kind permission of James Thompson.

This will give them the opportunity to discuss the new evaluations with Signet Manager, Sam Boon, and to view the Sansaw Flock, which has been Signet recording since 2009.

INTRODUCING CHARLOTTE ATTWELL & THE BRAMBLE FLOCK

SO far in my flock I have three Shropshire Down ewes, two yearling ewes, one ram, four Shropshire Down cross Poll Dorset yearling ewes, four Shropshire ewe lambs and one Shropshire ram lamb.

My flock started a few years ago when my grandparents went to market. Before they went I asked them if they could buy me a Dorset Down or two. When they returned I found three very nice looking ewes in the shed. I knew they weren't Dorsets, so I asked what breed they were and...I had never heard of Shropshire Downs.

When we got them they were very nervous and unsettled. It took us a while to get them used to us and finally they would come up to say hello.

Two years ago we put them to a Poll Dorset ram and then last spring the ewes had eight lambs between them. Two had triplets and one had twins. I really didn't expect to have eight lambs from three ewes and even better there were four ewe lambs and four ram lambs.

We castrated the rams and sold them on at market as wethers. We kept the ewe lambs that are now very naughty yearlings! Last July we went to Liz Bowles (Hayne Oak Flock) to look at her sheep for sale and we went home with a lovely young ram that I call Walter. We let Walter run with the ewes and now I have five lovely lambs - four girls and one ram lamb called Apollo.



Since I have had Walter I have been training him on the halter and he is getting better every time. Hopefully I will be seeing some of you other Shropshire breeders at upcoming shows and events.

I have also been training the two Shropshire yearling ewes. We bought them from Monique Hustinx (Silver Flock) in September last year. They are also progressing very well.

I have helped a lot with the lambing and learned a lot more. Thankfully this year all the lambs came perfectly, all the right way, but two of the ewes did need a tiny bit of help pulling the lambs out.

This year's lambs I am going to sell when they get to be shearlings, so hopefully I will make some money from them so I can buy some more products for them and more sheep. I am keeping this year's ram lamb (Apollo) as a full ram.



Charlotte is based near Langport in Somerset.

CALLING JUNIOR MEMBERS

There will be a sheep camp later this year, organised by our youth coordinator, Rosie Lee. No date has been set yet - but please do get in touch with Rosie if you are interested in attending. The sooner we know who would like to join us, the sooner we can organise a venue and date. The camp is for anyone interested in getting together with other young breeders and sharing ideas, experience etc. It will include training in ring-craft and sheep trimming, and will also be of interest to those aiming for the National Young Stars team. For more information and to put your name down, contact Rosie on 01606301503@talktalk.net