

SHROPTALK

The Newsletter of the Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association



Spring 2011



After the long winter, spring grass and sunshine are finally here!

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SSBA'S WEBSITE

OVER the forthcoming weeks, you will notice changes to the SSBA's website, which has been significantly upgraded.

There will be new sections that have never been available before, plus help and advice for Shropshire sheep breeders from a variety of sources, including the National Sheep Association (NSA) and EBLEX.

The overall "look" of the site has been revised, although we will still be able to run the site with our existing software program. The main improvements you will notice are:

- A new layout, to make it more user-friendly and easier for website visitors to access information and forms;
- Much more information about the SSBA's rules, procedures and policies;
- A new "Forms" section that will hold copies of all the society's forms, including Membership Forms, Show Points Contest entry forms, Showing Subsidy claim forms, along with standard society forms relating to Transfer of Ownership and Service Records.

Advertising Sheep On The Website

All SSBA members can advertise stock they have for sale **FREE OF CHARGE** on the

website. You will have received with this edition of *ShropTalk* a copy of the new Sales Register Form. If you wish to advertise sheep, please complete this form and return it to Sales Officer, Claire Jakeman. The information will then be transferred to the website and flocks will be listed by geographical region.

Shropshire Sheep Photo Gallery

Members are welcome to submit photos and digital images of their sheep for inclusion in the website's gallery. These can be pictures of sheep at shows, or general photos taken on the farm. Owing to space constraints, entries will be limited to TWO pictures from a member per event or submission. Pictures should be sent to our Secretary, Simon Mackay.

Monthly Website Updates

Simon will keep the content of our website fresh and up-to-date by adding new material on a monthly basis.

If you would like any new information to be included on the site, please send it for consideration to Simon by the 5th day of each month. News and information that is approved by the editing committee will then go on-line within the following 14 days.

FIRST FRENCH BREEDER JOINS THE SSBA

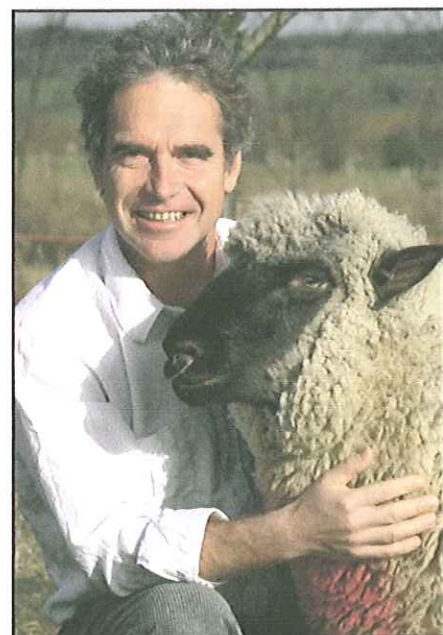
MONSIEUR Benoît Gille (pictured below) is the first breeder of Shropshire sheep in France to join our breed society as a full member.

Under a new arrangement that was approved by the SSBA's Council last December, it's now possible for French Shropshire flock-owners to register their sheep with the SSBA and receive full pedigree certificates for animals born in France, provided they comply with all the SSBA's existing rules and regulations.

There is currently no alternative flock book society available in France, where French breeders can register Shropshire sheep. The SSBA has appointed two Coordinators, Liz Bowles and Les Newman, to oversee this new area of breed society activities. Final details are still to be agreed by Council, but it is likely that French sheep and French members will be listed separately in our annual flock book.

Benoît is one of a number of French farmers who have imported Shropshires from the UK over the past three years. He currently runs a flock of around 250 ewes, kept mainly for grazing in apple orchards and amongst deciduous trees, such as plums and walnuts.

Other French farmers who purchased Shropshires from the UK have been contacted to let them know about this new development. The SSBA's Council hopes that several more French Shropshire flock owners will soon join the society.



www.shropshire-sheep.co.uk

EXPORT PRICES

THE SSBA's Council has decided to keep the export prices for 2011 the same as last year, apart from a £10 per head increase in the price for Shearling Ewes. Prices per head are as follows:

Shearling Ram (where the ARR/ARR genotype is specified by the buyer): £610
Shearling Ram (unspecified genotype): £480
Ram Lamb (specified ARR/ARR genotype): £460
Ram Lamb (genotype unspecified): £380
Shearling Ewe: £250
Two-Shear Breeding Ewe: £200
Ewe lamb: £160

The SSBA has received an export order from France for 100 ewe lambs and an order for one ram for a German flock, which will be supplied in accordance with the breed society's export ram rota.

SALES REGISTER

SALES Register forms are included with this edition of *ShropTalk* (one per flock). Additional copies can now be downloaded from the SSBA's upgraded website.

If you would like to advertise stock for sale on our website, please complete this form and return it to Claire Jakeman (address on the form). There is NO CHARGE for placing an advert and you can update your entry as many times as you wish during the year. If you do not have access to the internet but require extra Sales Register Forms, please contact the SSBA's Secretary, Simon Mackay.

Please keep your entry on the website up-to-date by informing either Claire or Simon of any significant changes to the stock you have for sale. The website is updated once a month.

RAMPAGES

PLEASE note that there will no edition of the *RAMPAGES* this year. The publication was not well supported by members in 2010, and the introduction of a successful show and sale at Shrewsbury at the beginning of July has provided breeders with an excellent venue for buying and selling rams early in the season. Males can also be advertised on the SSBA's website, free of charge, via the Sales Register.

REGISTRATION REMINDER

ALL females must be registered with the breed society before being entered in our National Shows & Sales, and all females over four months old must be registered before being sold either privately or through a recognised auction sale. Vendors are also responsible for paying the transfer fees (£3/head).

If you are selling Shropshires to someone who is not a member of the SSBA, the sheep must still be registered with the breed society. Please also inform our Secretary, Simon Mackay, of any new Shropshire owners who may be interested in joining the SSBA.

100 CLUB WINNERS

THE winners of the SSBA's 100 Club Spring Draw are as follows:

First prize (£60) to Mrs K Mills of Penrith, Cumbria;
Second prize (£30) to Mr D Peat of Whixall, Shropshire.
A second draw will be made at the SSBA's AGM in the autumn.

IT'S SHOW (AND SALE) TIME!

SUMMER is on its way, and it's time for us to think about showing our Shropshires - and maybe selling some animals or bringing new bloodlines into our flocks.

The number of shows now offering breed classes for Shropshires has increased over the past few years and we now have many events where we can exhibit our sheep. Even if you don't yet feel ready to venture into the showing, these shows are great opportunities to see good quality Shropshires at their best.

If you are interested in learning to trim sheep for showing, please register your interest with our Secretary, and we will organise workshops if there is enough demand.

Following the re-introduction of a show and sale at Shrewsbury Market, we now have two **National Shows And Sales** (Shrewsbury on 2nd July and Melton Mowbray on 9th/10th September).

In addition, there are several other markets that run sales for traditional

and native breeds, some of which also run showing classes beforehand. Details of these events will be posted on our website in due course.

If you are interested in selling stock at Shrewsbury or Melton Mowbray, please note the rules and regulations that apply:

Restriction On Entries Per Flock

Each flock can enter up to two males and 15 females. Numbers are limited to ensure that only good quality stock is offered for sale and to encourage smaller flocks to enter their animals. All females must be fully registered with the SSBA before the sale, and males must be birth notified and eligible for registration.

Minimum Weights For Lambs

Ram lambs and ewe lambs entered at Shrewsbury must weigh at least 45 and 35kg, respectively. The weights for lambs entered at Melton are slightly higher, as the sale takes place later in the year: 50kg for ram lambs and 40kg for ewe lambs. Lambs will be weighed on arrival and must meet the minimum weights in order to be offered for sale.

Upset Prices

The minimum upset prices for both show and sale venues are as follows:

Ewe lambs: 100gns
Shearling ewes 150gns
Ram lambs: 140gns
Shearling rams: 200gns
Older ewes and rams: at vendors' discretion.
Vendors may set higher reserve prices for their animals if they wish.

Transfer Fees And Registration Fees

The vendor selling a ram or ram lamb to a society member will be required to register the animal with the SSBA. Transfer fees for all stock (£3/animal) will be charged to buyers and collected automatically by the auctioneers.

Showing Sheep

All males entered in the show and sale **MUST** be shown. For females, the show class

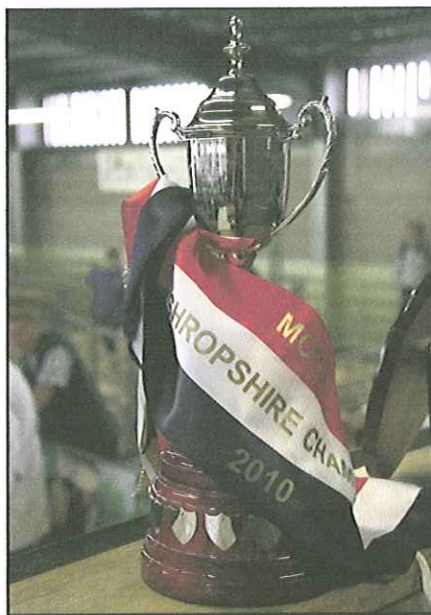
-es are optional

Inspections

All animals will be inspected by a breed society inspector prior to the showing classes. Inspection cards will be displayed on the pen fronts after inspection has taken place.

Show Classes

The following show classes are available at both Shrewsbury and Melton Mowbray
Senior Ram (2-shear and over);
Shearling Ram;
Ram Lamb (born on or after 1st Dec 2010);
Breeding Ewe (to have



reared a lamb or lambs in 2011, shorn bare on or after 1st May 2011);

Shearling Ewe;

Ewe Lamb (born on or after 1st Dec 2010).

Ram classes may be amalgamated if there are insufficient entries to run two classes.

SSBA Rosettes and prize cards will be awarded to 6th place in all classes. At Shrewsbury, the Champion Shropshire is awarded the Morley Perpetual Challenge Cup (pictured above) and the Reserve Champion receives the Roydon Shield. The Southworth Shield is awarded to the best prepared pen of two or more Shropshires. At Melton Mowbray, there is an attractive trophy for the overall Champion of the Shropshire breed.

Social Events

At both events there will be an opportunity for Shropshire breeders to hold a social "get-together": At Shrewsbury, there will be a BBQ at nearby Sansaw Hall the night before the sale, by courtesy of James Thompson (see page 6 for more details). At Melton Mowbray, there is a buffet supper open to all exhibitors at the market on Friday 9th Sept. You must, however, have a ticket, purchased in advance, if you want to attend these events.

Closing Dates For Entries To The National Shows And Sales

WEST (SHREWSBURY)

20th May 2011

EAST (MELTON MOWBRAY)

29th July (paper) or

5th August (on-line)

SPECIAL ACCOLADE FOR AMERICAN BREEDERS VISITING THE UK

IN late June, the SSBA will welcome two distinguished American breeders of Shropshire sheep, who are visiting the UK for our National Show and Sale (West).

Fred Groverman from Petaluma in California has been invited by the breed society to be chief judge for the Shropshire classes at Shrewsbury Market on the 2nd July. The assistant judge will be fellow US Shropshire breeder, Cody Hiemke, from Stoughton, Wisconsin. We believe Fred and Cody are the first overseas breeders in the history of the SSBA to have the honour of judging one of the society's National Show and Sale events.

We will also have the pleasure of meeting Fred's daughter Judy, and Cody's wife Ruth, who are joining them on the trip to the UK.

Traditional Breed Standards

Not only is Fred scoring "a first" as a US breeder judging Shropshires in the UK, he is also one of the world's most experienced Shropshire flock-owners. Indeed, the Groverman Shropshire Flock has the longest continuous history of ownership by a single family anywhere in the World. It was established in 1934 by Fred's father, Bernard, and the breeding of Shropshires has continued uninterrupted on their ranch to the present day, with a particular focus on "utility, performance and improving the breed".

Groverman Shropshires are stockier and slightly smaller than the current show type in the USA. The Grovermans have always paid particular attention to traditional breed standards, and many animals in Fred's current flock can trace their pedigrees back to a British ram lamb, "California New Type 2", bred by John Belcher (Tibberton Flock) of Newport in the county of Shropshire. This animal was exported to the USA as a ram lamb in 1950. At a year old, New Type sheared 8.6kg of wool and weighed 143kg. In his first season as a flock sire he was bred to 86 ewes and all of them lambed. Very sadly, Bernard Groverman was destined never to see the ram's offspring for he died suddenly of a heart attack in Oct-

ober 1951. But Bernard's breeding programme and his passion for Shropshires were continued by his widow, Ida, and their son Fred.

As well as ranching and rearing sheep, Fred has pursued a successful career as a vet. He qualified in 1958 and had a mixed animal practice which treated cattle, horses and chickens, as well as lions, bears, elephants and anteaters! Fred still owns the Cotati Small Animal Hospital, which he established in 1986. He has also been the Sonoma County Fair Veterinarian since 1977. In this role he facilitates an auction at the fair which generates over \$1 million each year for local youth programmes.

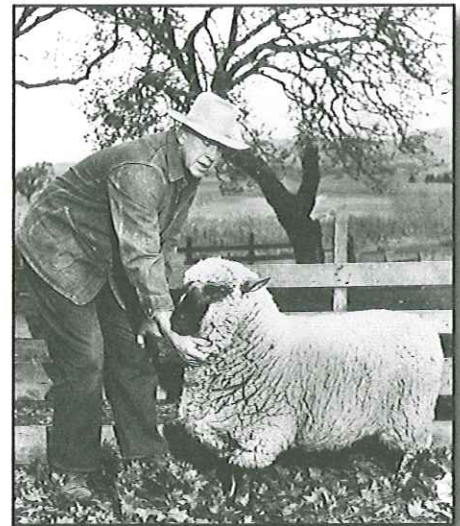
Fred married Pat Humble during his senior year at vet school, and soon a new generation of Grovermans (Karen, Jim, Judy and Bill) were helping out with the sheep enterprise. Each had their own flock at an early age and exhibited their livestock. From the mid 1950s until the mid 1980s, Groverman Shropshires were regularly to be seen on the local show circuit.

Meanwhile, Fred became well-known in the USA as a Shropshire breeder and he was a Board Member of the American Shropshire Registry (the national breed society) for six years and President from 1979 to 1981.

Performance Traits

Performance traits have always been important in the Groverman Flock. Lamb weights have been recorded since 1964 and production records of ewe families date back to 1934. Ultra-sound evaluations for larger loins were added to flock selection criteria in the late 1990s, and in 2009 the Groverman Flock was one of six Shropshire flocks in the US to join the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP). This generates Estimated Breeding Values for a range of performance traits to help identify sheep with high genetic merit - a very similar system to the SSBA's on-going breed improvement scheme.

The flock has been closed to outside genetics since the 1990s, with the exception of two im-



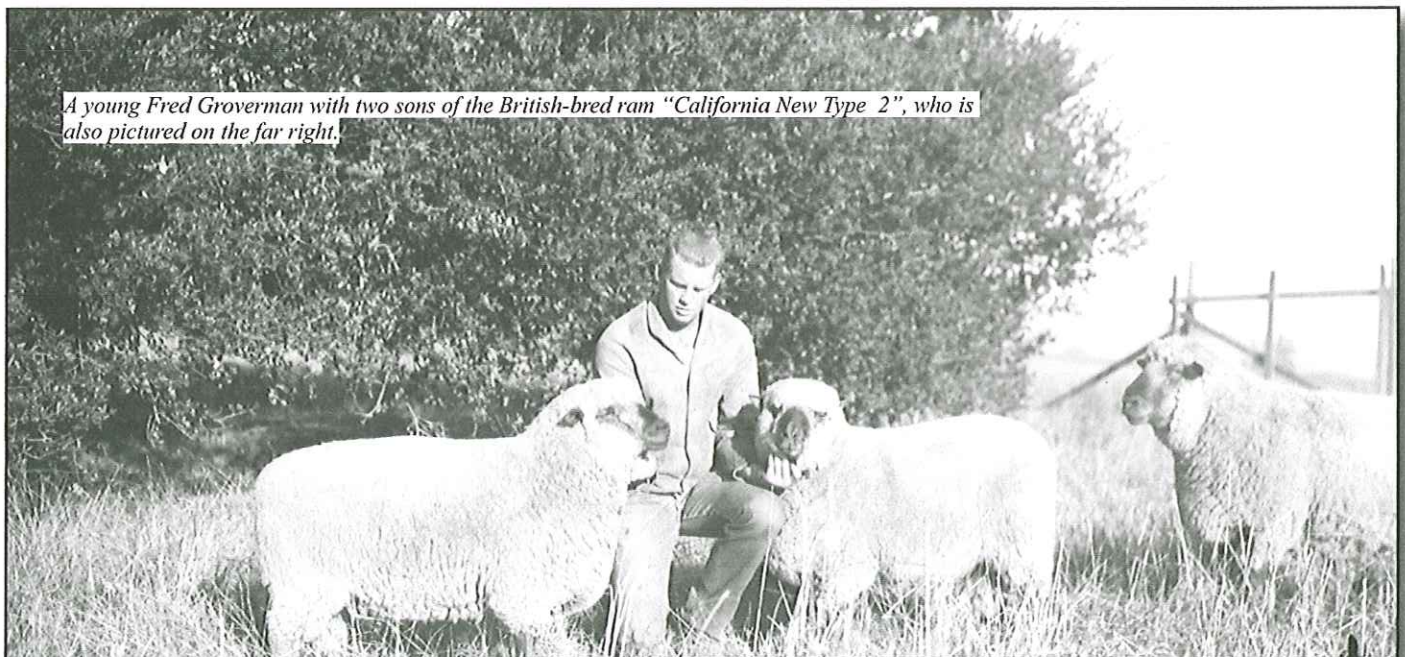
Fred's father, Bernard Groverman with the British-bred "California New Type 2".

ports of semen, one from New Zealand in the early 2000s and English Shropshire semen from Piddington Douglas in 2008.

Fred's compatriot, Cody Hiemke, is a commercial Shropshire breeder and he is also a meat procurement specialist for Niman Ranch - one of the largest natural meat companies in the USA. Cody is a Board Member of the American Shropshire Registry and Chairman of its Performance Committee.

Cody's "Mapleton Mynd" Shropshires are managed in conjunction with the Hiemke family's Shropshire flock. The combined 50-ewe enterprise focuses on production traits, exemplary breed type and moderate frame. Performance traits are also recorded via the NSIP.

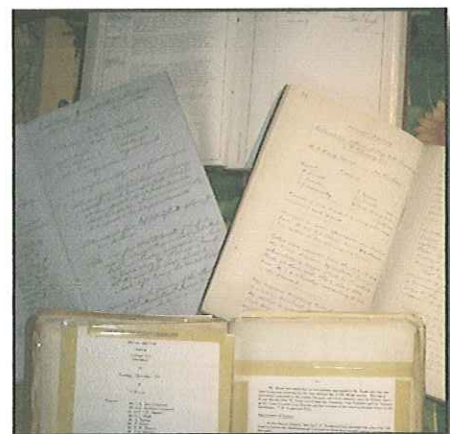
Fred and Cody are greatly looking forward to their visit to the UK this summer and will be making a few flock visits as well as attending the Sansaw Barbecue, where they hope to meet many fellow breed enthusiasts.



A young Fred Groverman with two sons of the British-bred ram "California New Type 2", who is also pictured on the far right.

SHOWS WITH BREED CLASSES FOR SHROPSHIRES

Shropshire County Show	14 th & 15 th May	01743 289831 www.shropshirecountyshow.co.uk
Staffordshire County Show	1 st & 2 nd June	01785 247 111 www.staffscountyshowground.co.uk
East of England Show	17 th – 19 th June	01733 234 451 www.eastofengland.co.uk
Three Counties Show	17 th – 19 th June	01684 584 900 www.threecouties.co.uk
Cheshire County Show	21 st & 22 nd June	01565 650 200 www.cheshirecountyshow.org.uk
SSBA (West) Show & Sale - Shrewsbury	2 nd July	01743 462 620 www.hallsgb.co.uk
Royal Welsh Show	18 th – 21 st July	01982 554 403 www.rwas.co.uk
Burwarton Show	4 th August	01982 554 403 www.burwartonshow.co.uk
Oswestry Show	6 th August	01691 654875 www.oswestryshow.co.uk
Denbigh & Flint Show	18 th August	01352 712 131 www.denbighandflintshow.com
Minsterley Show	20 th August	01743 242 559 www.minsterleyshow.org.uk
Poynton Show	28 th August	01625 890 183 www.poyntonshow.co.uk
SSBA (East) Show & Sale - Melton Mowbray	9 th & 10 th September	01664 562 971 www.meltonmowbraymarket.co.uk



OLD MINUTE BOOKS

THE SSBA has a collection of old minute books dating right back to the first council meeting of our breed society in 1882. Until recently, these fascinating records of the history of Shropshire sheep have been stored on behalf of the SSBA by Sue Shimwell. Sue has now passed them on to Alison Schofield, the Registrar, and a new fire-proof box has been purchased by the society in order to ensure their continued survival in good condition. We plan to publish excerpts from some of the more interesting meetings in future editions of *ShropTalk*.

SHOWING SUBSIDY

SSBA members who exhibit their Shropshires at shows running for two or more days can claim a subsidy from the SSBA. This is to help with entry fees and travel expenses, and to encourage more breeders to show their stock at the major shows. The subsidy rate agreed for 2011 is £5/head for two-day shows and £10/head for longer shows.

Please note that the Cheshire County Show will now be considered a two-day event, provided that exhibitors' sheep are shown on at least one of the days and the same sheep remain on the show-ground for the whole duration of the show. Subsidy claim forms can be downloaded from the SSBA's Website and must be completed and returned to the SSBA's Treasurer by 31st August 2011. Please contact Simon Mackay if you require a form by post.

SHOW POINTS CONTEST

THE SSBA awards four trophies each year for success in the show-ring. Breeders can accrue points for animals placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd, and also for those achieving success as breed champion, reserve champion and interbreed champion. The competition for Junior Members, for which the Hornpipe Quaiche is the trophy, awards points for placings in showing classes and also recognises success in Young Handlers' classes.

The President's Trophy is awarded for the highest number of points gained in "Any Other Breed" Classes. The Piddington Trophy is for the most points achieved in Shropshire Breed Classes. The Novice Trophy is awarded to the new exhibitor who achieves the highest number of points in Shropshire breed classes. Entry forms can also be downloaded from the SSBA's website, or supplied by post if requested from the SSBA's Secretary. Completed entry forms must be sent to the Awards Officer, Anne Harvey, before the closing date of 30th September 2011.

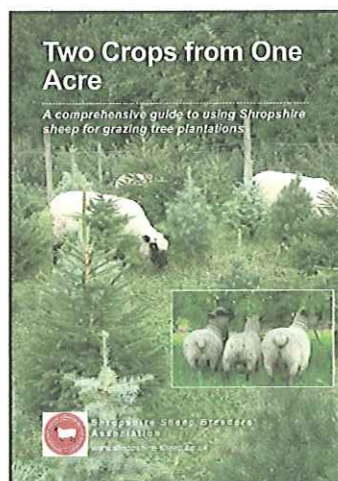
FREE GUIDE TO GRAZING SHROPSHIRES IN TREE PLANTATIONS

TWO Crops from One Acre, the SSBA's technical guide to managing Shropshires in tree plantations, is proving invaluable for promoting our breed.

The 44-page 2nd edition (pictured right) was launched in July 2008 and has been widely publicised in the UK and overseas. The breed society has now sold enough booklets to cover the cost of producing this guide.

The SSBA's Council has, therefore, decided to make the "Two Crops" booklet available free of charge to people who are seriously interested in keeping Shropshires to graze amongst trees. Anyone wishing to receive a free copy should send a stamped, addressed envelope to the Secretary, Simon Mackay, with a note requesting the booklet. The envelope needs to be A5 size with a large letter stamp (first or second class).

If you have received a sales enquiry from someone who is thinking about buying Shropshires for trees, please tell them about this booklet and how to obtain a free copy. It is important to emphasise to potential buyers that there is a system for managing Shropshires in



trees, and this must be followed in order for the enterprise to be a success.

The booklet is also available free to breed society members and you can obtain a copy by sending Simon a SAE, as above, or you can pick up a copy from the SSBA's breed stands at the NSA events listed on page 5 of this newsletter. Copies will also be available from Simon at the Cheshire County Show and at our two National Shows and Sales (Shrewsbury and Melton Mowbray).

BREED IMPROVEMENT SCHEME DEVELOPMENTS

TERMINAL SIRE INDEX

A NEW Terminal Sire Index will be introduced to the Shropshire Breed Improvement Scheme (SBIS) in 2011 to help us promote Shropshire tups to commercial meat lamb producers.

This new Index will be calculated using just growth and carcass traits measured in recorded animals. Unlike the original SBIS Index, it will take no account of the maternal ability of the ewes. Signet will, however, continue to provide SBIS flocks with the original Index (known as the "Carcass Plus" Index, or "Welsh" Index), so breeders will still be able to identify animals that have good maternal traits as well as good meat production traits.

"Compared with many lowland breeds, Shropshires have good maternal traits, being relatively prolific, easy lambing and raising twins with ease," says SBIS Coordinator Pippa Geddes. "Whilst we do not want the breed to lose these characteristics, it's important for the Shropshire to re-establish itself as a terminal sire.

"Farmers producing meat lambs are not interested in the maternal ability that a ram might confer to his female offspring - they just want to focus on the growth and carcass traits he is likely to pass on to his lambs. Many of these flock-owners are already selecting rams on the basis of the Terminal Sire Index. By introducing this Index to SBIS, we should make our rams more appealing to them. It will also help members to identify animals that have superior terminal sire traits."

PENALTIES FOR ULTRA LEAN SHEEP

SIGNET Breeding Services will apply an adjustment to both the Terminal Sire Index and the Carcass Plus Index calculated for Shropshires to ensure that ultra lean sheep do not obtain high Index scores.

This adjustment has been introduced because

breeders were concerned that *some* sheep which gained high Index scores were so lean that they would not finish at the target slaughter weight.

Known as "ATAN", the adjustment has been used for other breeds that record flock performance using the Signet recording scheme. It "knocks back" the Index score for any very lean sheep and it is applied to the Estimated Breeding Value for Fat when calculating the two Indices. It will not affect the actual EBV for fat, which will continue to be shown in Signet reports.

Fat sheep will continue to be penalized as before - that is, the fatter the sheep, the higher the penalty.

PERFORMANCE CLASSES AT THE CHESHIRE COUNTY SHOW

THE classes for performance-recorded Shropshire rams and ram lambs will continue at the Cheshire County Show, which attracts the largest number of Shropshire exhibitors of any show in the country. But in order to streamline the judging, the two performance classes will now be amalgamated into the general showing classes:

Recorded and non-recorded rams and ram lambs will be judged together on looks and prizes awarded as in any showing class. Signet-recorded Shropshires entered in the Performance Classes will then remain in the show-ring while the Signet assessment takes place. This will be judged on a combination of looks (40% of the marks - allocated according to placement in the main showing class) and the Signet Index score (60% of marks). The Index used for this assessment will be the new Terminal Sire Index.

EBLEX has generously agreed to sponsor these classes again and will provide a £50 voucher to the winner of each performance class. These vouchers can be redeemed for cash, on proof of purchase of a high-Index,

performance recorded Shropshire male. The winners of both classes will also receive a show sash, kindly provided by RAS Rosettes, Ribbons and Show Supplies.

PUBLICATION OF EBVs

THE SSBA's Council has decided that it will be mandatory for a full set of Estimated Breeding Values to be published in the sale catalogue for all Signet-recorded Shropshires sold at the breed society's two National Shows and Sales (Shrewsbury and Melton Mowbray).

This rule applies to male and female stock. EBVs and Indices for these animals will be verified prior to the event by Signet. The most up-to-date evaluations for each animal will be the ones published. A brief guide to understanding EBVs will also be published in the catalogues to assist buyers.

SIGNET EVALUATIONS IN 2011

There will be two full SBIS evaluation runs that will include scanning results as well as lamb weight records, during 2011. Reports from the first evaluation will be available from breeders in early June and the second and final evaluation reports will be available in early September. A summary of results, including top stock sires used in the recorded flocks and the highest indexing ram lambs, will be sent to all SSBA members with either the Autumn or Winter *ShropTalk*.

MOST IMPROVED FLOCK AWARD

THE first EBLEX award for the most improved Shropshire flock was made this spring - and the winner was the Sansaw Flock, owned by James Thompson (see page 6).

The award will now be made on an annual basis to the SBIS flock that has made the greatest genetic progress year-on-year. To assess this, EBLEX compares the average genetic index for lambs in the flock from one season to the next.



The new Terminal Sire Index will be calculated exclusively from growth and carcass traits, including measurements of eye muscle depth and fat depth in the loin area, measured in the live animal by ultra-sonic scanning (pictured above).

SHEEP EVENT NEWS

FOR the first time ever, the SSBA's breed stand will be exhibited at the Balmoral Show, Belfast, Northern Ireland (11th to 13th May). Our Breed Stand Officer, Barry Hodson, has worked tirelessly for two years to get our display into this extremely popular event, which will provide a great platform for promoting Shropshires in the Province.

If you are able to assist by manning the stand during this event, please contact Barry as soon as possible on 01925 765304, or by email: barry.hodson@virgin.net.

Our breed stand will also be at the following regional sheep events, organised by the National Sheep Association:

North Sheep, Hexham, Northumberland (8th June); **Sheep South West**, Paignton, Devon (14th June); **Sheep NI**, Ballymena (4th July).

Free entry tickets will be provided for any members willing to help on the SSBA's stand. Please contact Breed Stand Officer, Barry Hodson, if you can help.

DON'T MISS THE SANSAW BARBECUE!

FOLLOWING the success of last year's BBQ, James Thompson has generously agreed to host another on 1st July - the evening before our National Show and Sale (West).

The BBQ will be held in The Coach House at Sansaw Hall near Shrewsbury, starting at 7.30pm. Entry will be by ticket only (£10 to include two food courses and a complimentary drink). Tickets must be purchased in advance so that catering can be planned. A cash bar will also be available.

The SSBA plans to run a raffle during the evening, with proceeds going to Help For Heroes and the SSBA. Please bring a raffle prize if you would like to support these worthy causes. We will be entertaining Shropshire breeders from overseas at this event, so why not come along and enjoy the wonderful venue and meet some fellow Shropshire enthusiasts? Tickets are available from the SSBA's Secretary, Simon Mackay.

SOUTH WEST OPEN-DAY

SSBA Council Members, Liz Bowles and Monique Hustinx, are organising an open-day in Devon on 25th June from 11am to 3pm at Hayne Oak Farm, Butterleigh. This will be an opportunity to meet other Shropshire breeders from the region and beyond, to see the Hayne Oak and Sidedowns Flocks and share lunch. RSVP to either Monique (07810 297886) or Liz (01884 32983) by 18th June.

TRIMMING WORKSHOP



THE breed society has received a number of requests from members who would like to learn how to prepare their sheep for the show ring. We have therefore organised a practical workshop at Sansaw Estate on 4th June. The instructor will be Chris Crowther, who has successfully trimmed for many breeders exhibiting sheep at County and Royal Show level.

There will be a charge for attending this event. The exact fee will depend on the number of participants but will be no more than £10/head. If you are interested in attending, please contact the SSBA's Secretary, Simon Mackay.

SHROPTALK

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SANSAW FLOCK WINS TOP AWARD

THE winner of the EBLEX Improved Flock Awards for the Shropshire breed for 2011 is the Sansaw Flock, owned by James Thompson of Sansaw Farms near Shrewsbury in Shropshire.

Organised through the Sheep Better Returns Programme (BRP), this award is presented to the performance recorded flock that has shown the most impressive improvement in genetic merit over a 12-month period. The competition is based on the results of Signet records for 17 Shropshire flocks.

Shropshire sheep have been bred at Sansaw since at least 1882, although the current flock was only established in 2007, when it was restocked mainly from the Sidedowns Flock in Devon. The farm, which runs to 408ha, is managed organically and has pig, potato and carrot enterprises, and a small Hereford suckler herd, as well as the flock of 150 pedigree Shropshire ewes.

James Thompson remained loyal to Shropshires due not only to the historic links, but also because he believes carcasses from Shropshire sired lambs can meet butchers' requirements just as well as those sired by Continental terminal sires. Native breeds can also finish off grass without the need for expensive supplementary feeding. The flock has been recording with Signet for 18 months and rams have been selected on the basis of their Estimated Breeding Values, alongside a visual appraisal of their conformation.

"Recording gives credibility to the job we do and provides evidence to back up what we see in the field, such as the fact that the lambs grow well off grass," explains James.

"We also use EBVs when selecting ewes to keep to see how their lambs have performed, and consider the EBVs of all potential breeding rams. Our aim is to produce quality rams for commercial producers to use in their flocks, and to create demand for this

traditional yet versatile breed."

SATISFIED CUSTOMER

Mark Dibble runs a commercial ewe flock on a neighbouring farm on the Allbrighton Estate. He uses Texel, Suffolk and Shropshire rams to produce crossbred lambs to supply the farm shop. The Shropshire rams are purchased from Sansaw. "Shropshire sired lambs perform just as well as the lambs sired by other breeds and take a similar time to finish off grass," says Mr Dibble. "It is also good to have Shropshire lambs available in the shop, as they promote the fact we are supporting a locally sourced native breed."

The EBLEX awards for most improved flock are made across several breeds and recognise those that have achieved the greatest progress over a year, based on their average Signet index for genetic merit.

The average index for the Sansaw Flock in 2010 was 90, an increase of 32 index points compared with its average score of 58 in 2009. In second place were Peter and Pippa Geddes (Alderton Flock) who increased the average genetic index of their sheep by 22 index points from a score of 116 to 138. Liz Bowles and Mike Bray (Hayne Oak Flock) were third, having increased the average index of their sheep by 16 points to a score of 96.

COMMITMENT

"James is to be congratulated for his commitment to improving the Shropshire breed in such a short time. Performance recording now forms the backbone to his success, and he and his customers benefit from this more informed approach to breeding says Signet's sheep breeding specialist, Samuel Boon.

"Many more sheep producers – pedigree and commercial - are using EBVs to help make their breeding decisions. This in turn is making their businesses more profitable and the industry more competitive as a whole."



James Thompson with a tuppung group from the Sansaw Flock.