

CEO UPDATE



Rounding up 2024...

Crikey where has 2024 gone! The production cycle is starting again with many of you starting to lamb as per the rules on Christmas day when you start to see the results of your toils from the last 12 months come to fruition. I wish each one of you a very happy Christmas, a successful lambing season and a fruitful and prosperous 2025.

Council met in person as has become the tradition for our December meeting and what a difference the in person makes to the Zoom call format that has become the norm! A very full agenda was worked through in order and I use this update to communicate some of the decisions made at council by your elected representatives.

FINANCE REPORT

We have returned to a trading surplus following two years of loss on our trading activities. This is a welcome return and the focus that we have had to turn this round over the last year through the finance committee has paid dividends. Focussing on cost reduction and stimulating income has enabled us to turn in a modest surplus. We just need to prove that this wasn't a "fluke" by keeping the momentum going throughout 2025 and using the time to develop plans and ideas to utilise the surplus to promote the breed and keep the upward trend in our return to favour by the wider industry. The accounts were presented to Council for approval, and they will be distributed to you all for your inspection in time for the AGM scheduled for March 2025 in Edinburgh, all members are welcome to attend the AGM.

NORTHERN COUNTIES BRANCH & H&H SALE

We have had an interesting approach which has been the talk of the membership in certain quarters about an approach made to the Society by H&H to "Upgrade" the Northern counties Branch sale held at the beginning of August in 2025. H&H report that they are seeing a very much increased interest in the Suffolk breed across the pedigree and commercial sectors of the sheep industry. The sale format and actions taken to date were discussed at Council and the following actions have been approved. We will work through the format of the sale with H&H with a subcommittee of the Northern Branch the Chair and the CEO to come to a revised sale structure with a change to the one day sale making it a two day event scheduled for Friday the 1st August for inspection and show with the sale starting on Saturday morning 2nd of August and the addition of a social gathering on the Friday evening after the show.

CODE OF CONDUCT REVIEW

It's an unfortunate consequence from emotive reactions to situations that Council recommended a re-visit to the Code of Conduct held within our Bye laws just to make it clearer. The adjustments have been made and the additions included, which outlines who can report any incidence of misconduct, to who they should report it to, and a bit more clarity in the punitive measures that the Society may deem appropriate to take depending on the severity of the individual case.

1886 HERITAGE SUFFOLK LAMB

I had hoped to be a little further down the road with this and how to monetise it for the Society, we have sent out the post cards as a declaration of interest and have received 15 responses – we have had some more printed and will be sending these to members to keep building this list. All I am currently doing is acknowledging by email and saying watch this space for further information.

I have been working further on increasing the awareness of this project within my expanding processor network.

At the SBRT event there were several speakers who presented the beef story and what they were doing on beef to improve the carbon footprint. Everyone bar none had been working on beef, and lamb was not the focus up to now. ABP went through their programme for beef. ABP have a vertically integrated beef scheme based on Dairy beef. This gives a consistent carcass weight and size that they can work with, with the retailers to offer fixed price packs and so on. A question from the floor was is there anything like this in sheep and Katie Thorley stated that there wasn't anything on sheep and perhaps it wouldn't be possible as there was not a dairy herd to produce the progeny. My view is that I have been including within my processor presentations and have been working with the Stratified heep group that we have the mule flock. Our thoughts are that Mules are kept by 60% of the commercial sheep industry and when crossed with the Suffolk produce a very consistent carcass which we have data to back up.

Perhaps there isn't a route to vertically integrate the lamb supply chain but there may be the opportunity to build a producer group that use Suffolk over mules under the welfare regs and health status that we can keep control of, and supply processors through that group.

I did take H&H through the story that I am presenting to the processors and there was an interest in a second sale later in the year aimed at the commercial tup buyer and the question asked if they could see the progeny come back through the live ring. It could be that we may be able to stage an 1886 Heritage Suffolk second sale at H&H aimed at the commercial market.

One processor has committed to take some lambs in to do some carcass evaluations which took us to, how long the Suffolk lamb could be supplied for throughout the year.

I have been thinking along the lines of 6-8 months but the more I look at the production of the lamb from the mule flock the more I am realising that this may be optimistic. More research is required into just how long we can take lambs from the market and supply Suffolk Sired lamb.

Things tend to quieten off a bit Jan, Feb and March as many of you are tied up lambing so just about the only opportunity in the year that I must progress with this development which I see as vital as part of the Society going forward.

For the council members who had later flights back from the council meeting I delivered a workshop on 1886 which was very warmly received and highlighted that my updates that I send them and the 5 mins that we dedicate to this at Council doesn't reflect very well what stage I am at with this project, so I need to step that up in 2025. If anyone has a discussion group that is looking for a speaker, travel allowing, I would be happy to offer my services with a 20 min slide show I am sure I can convert the audience to Suffolk!

NSA EVENTS 2025

It's going to be a busy year with five NSA sheep events taking place in 2025, Highland sheep, Welsh sheep, Sheep Southwest, Northsheep and Sheep Northern Ireland. It's very important that

we maximise our exposure at these events, but this comes with a not insignificant cost. Manning the stands in some of the areas is an issue, but people make the events work. Farmers talking to farmers is a good platform to promote the breed and we need to make the most of the opportunity that these events affords. Your help to be available to do a stint on a stand at each of these events is essential and hopefully we can report back at the end of 2025 to say we have seen a return on our investment in having the space at the sheep events.

CEO Show and sale attendance 2025 was reviewed as the summer of 2025 with the five sheep events on has become very onerous in both cost and travel down time that it was agreed that the CEO cannot physically be at everything. We will be working through the schedule with the Chair and vice chair early in 2025 to make it all manageable.

GENOMIC PROJECT WITH AHDB / SRUC

From an industry perspective we are working with AHDB just to see what we can use our bank of genomic profiles for. The team at Signet are very proactive on this front. Genomics in the sheep industry are lacking behind the beef industry but it is important that we keep the Suffolk breed in the mix with any developments that can take us forward as a breed. Data is king and it is important that we have the data which we have and maximise the use of that data to run through the programmes and identify markers which can give us positive outcomes if we know which sheep have them. Work being done at the moment in a project which has been run in the United States to identify markers to highlight resistance to MV. Important steps that will help us keep this very costly disease in check.

DNA

For the last year we have been looking to how we can alter the way that we collect DNA and perhaps look at a change to the methodology using a DNA tag. Many of you with beef herds will be collecting via tags so will be aware of the process. I presented an option that we had to Council and for this year, it is possibly a bit late in the day to look at this but we have started of the pathway to this which we can hone over the summer months and perhaps have in place for the 2026 sale season. Our DNA testing for next year will remain the same by collecting via nasal swabs in the normal way and submitting them to the office.

YEARBOOK 2025

The yearbook for 2025 is coming together. Deadlines for adverts and copy have passed to allow time to collate, design, proof and approve so if you have not been in touch with gillfarmer@suffolksheep.org to submit your report, ad booking or artwork please do it now so that it can be included. We will hopefully be able to sign it off by end of January this year. We have been reaching out to more trade advertisers for their support for the publication and thank you to all our members who chose to advertise their flocks in the Yearbook. Added benefits are that your ad is included on the Society Web site and is also available in a digital format in the version on the web. We have over 2000 printed hard copies but also send the digital link out to many people from both at home and abroad so the opportunity is a good one to have some exposure in the yearbook. Don't forget that you can have members rates for trade advertising if you want to advertise your business.

MEMBERSHIP

We have started publicising our new members on the Facebook page every month so that you know where the new members are. Reach out to them please on a personal level if you know them. Each year at membership renewal invoice time we see an increase in the numbers of resignations from the Society. There are various reasons for this but the choice to remain a member or not, is theirs but we must do everything we can to retain our current members at club and branch level. If they see some success and reap the rewards they will stay.

NEXTGEN DEVELOPMENT

We are appealing to Branches and Clubs to add or hold as some have already done a NextGen event to the calendar to raise the profile. We have also extended this to new members who have a thirst for the same knowledge as the young members to widen the appeal. Any young person who is related to a member who would be interested in learning more about the Suffolk sheep breed qualifies to come to these events. You do not have to be a NextGen member to attend. If we can get this going a bit at Club and Branch level we are considering holding a larger event to follow AgriExpo at Carlisle in November but as always this would very much depend on uptake. In theory it would work and by widening the people who are welcome to attend to new breeders as well as young breeders, and members relatives we hope that we

can reach the critical mass to make it a good event. Branches and Clubs can apply for a bit of funding to help stage the event from the society the link to the form is [here](#) and submit to the CEO who will seek approval from the finance committee.

ZOOTECHNICAL REGULATIONS

The export market in 2024 has been seriously hampered by the outbreak of blue tongue which has effectively precluded any exports from our geographical area except for Northern Ireland. Taking out our buyers from the EU and beyond has undoubtedly affected the sales in GB adversely, but when the market re opens we need to maintain our status as an approved breed society in what is termed as a third country. To enable us to maintain this status we need to keep up with EU regulations with regards to our rules and practices so that we comply with the terms of our status. This involves submission of our rules and regulations for approval of compliance to DEFRA through DAERA. It's widely reported that Blue Tongue virus is rife over in our close EU partners and much of the industry cannot see why exports are banned so we continue to lobby through our affiliations to have the export market opened again and we are ready for that to happen.

STRATIFIED SHEEP GROUP

I continue to keep the Suffolk breed represented on the collective of breed Societies and it is all gathering pace with continued commitment of the Societies involved at the the outset. We continue our double-edged sword quest to tackle disease which is an intrinsic part of any enterprises Carbon Footprint. I attended the Sheep Breeders Round Table in November and the Carbon Footprint improvement through genetics a Genomic evaluation was very much up front and centre. We are working with Agritech to put together a plan to gather data and evaluate the principles that have made the stratified sheep system perhaps the biggest part of the sheep industry in the UK for centuries. The group is limited to native British breeds. We are working with tech companies industry scientists and the allied industries to evaluate, measure and market the story as a valuable contributor to lowering the carbon footprint. The sheep industry does not have the dairy herd to produce vertically integrated beef, but it does have a huge population of mules within the commercial flock. Can "Suffolk Sired Lamb" become the Aberdeen Angus of the sheep industry, I firmly believe it can, and the story is breaking! Watch this space in 2025.

I would like to finish by thanking you for your continued support throughout the year and wish you, your families and your flocks a Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

