

The association's AGM will be held by Zoom on 3rd March at 7:30pm. To receive your link to the meeting, please contact the association secretaries, by email at info@welshmules.co.uk

Given the Covid 19 restrictions, the agenda will be limited to discussing points that are required by our rules and by law.

AGENDA:

1. To receive a report on the association's activities
2. To receive accounts for the year to 31st August 2020 – copy also available by email request to info@welshmules.co.uk
3. Election of executive committee. The following members retire by rotation and being eligible, offer themselves for re-election: Gareth Rees; Brian Roberts; John Thomas; Dewi Jones
4. To approve Whittingham Riddell as association auditors

2021 SALE DATES**WELSHPOOL****Wednesday 8th September (Ewes)****Thursday 9th September
(Ewe Lambs)****Thursday 7th October
(Ewes and Ewe Lambs)****HEREFORD****Friday 10th September
(Ewes and Ewe Lambs)****Tuesday 12th October
(Ewes and Ewe Lambs)****RUTHIN****Saturday 11th September
(Ewes and Ewe Lambs)****INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

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WELSH MULES SHEEP BREEDERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Welsh Mule Sheep Breeders Association Ltd; Gorseland, North Road, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 2WB
Phone: 01970 636688; info@welshmules.co.uk

2020 Review

2020 proved to be the most difficult year for everyone, including the association. It might have been challenging enough had we just had to cope with Brexit but the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic in March had a devastating social and economic impact on all.

The Covid 19 restrictions forced us all to re-think our way of working and the association was no different. The executive committee had to defer the day-to-day management of business to the smaller publicity committee. Regular meetings of that group have been held throughout the year to ensure that the association was able to hold sales for members.

Restrictions were put in place to counter the worst effects of the virus on people and the structures of the country, especially the NHS. We were all required to maintain social distance, to stay at home as often as possible, to wear facemasks outside, to wash or sanitise hands and to exercise a great deal of caution generally. Shows and demonstrations were cancelled from small local shows to the Royal Welsh itself and sales had to be conducted under strict rules and conditions.

In the most difficult case, the association accepted that it would have been very hard to hold a sale as usual in Builth Wells, made even more problematic by the decision of Brightwells to withdraw from livestock auctioneering. Thankfully, Hereford Auction Markets stepped into the breach and the association agreed to their request to transfer our sale from Builth to Hereford because of the challenges of holding a sale with Covid restrictions in place on the open field site of the Royal Welsh showground. It was not an easy decision to make but local association members were consulted and we're pleased to say that the decision proved to be the right one with the sale in Hereford a success. Despite all the problems, all our sales were notable accomplishments, achieved in very difficult

circumstances. We'd like to express our sincere thanks to our auctioneers in Welshpool, Ruthin and Hereford, their staff and our members for all your work, dedication and patience.

It would be good to think that matters will be better in 2021. While the first weeks of the year have been seen high numbers of cases, we're all hoping that vaccinations will be a significant boost towards a return to normality. However, it's becoming clear that many restrictions will be in place for a while yet. Many shows, including the Royal Welsh have been postponed already and it's likely that others, if not all, will follow suit. With this in mind, it was proposed that the Builth Sales should stay at Hereford for another year. This way, the association can start advertising the Sales with the locations agreed. Promotional activities will be restricted so we'll be focusing more on press activity, social media and advertising in 2021. We'd be grateful for any stories or photographs to illustrate the success of Welsh Mules on farms to support our promotional efforts in the coming year. Grateful if you'd contact our new Field Officer, Will Jones or Association Secretary, Llyr Lewis, WAOS Ltd if you have such a story that we could use. Photographs are always welcome too.

As a result of the Covid restrictions, we're unable to hold an AGM in the normal way. We plan to try and hold one by video conferencing though and details of it are noted elsewhere in the newsletter. It will clearly not be as satisfactory as holding a normal meeting with voting more difficult for example. Nevertheless, we will try and provide you with an opportunity to be updated on the association's activities, but grateful if you'd be patient with us in the circumstances.

Very many thanks to you all for your help and support during the last difficult year and best wishes for a good lambing and successful sales again. Please take the greatest care and keep safe.

New Association Field Officer



We're pleased to announce that Will Jones, Cefn Hillin, Belan, Welshpool has been appointed as our new Field Officer to succeed Joe Hamer.

Will studied agriculture at Newtown College and has kept Welsh Mules for over ten years, all bought from the association's sales. He's won two breed championships at the Royal Welsh and has won the reserve champion twice as well as showing the Welsh Mule successfully at local shows. He's acted as a judge at the association's best ewe lamb competition at our annual sales and enjoyed success at progeny shows and sales.

Will has also been active in young farmers' activities and will bring enthusiasm and drive to the post. Because of the Covid 19 outbreak, it has been a difficult time for Will to start but we wish him well for the future.

I'm sure all association members will be willing to give him every support. Will can be contacted on

Tel: **07854 600667**

Email: **whjones@hotmail.com**

TAGGING SEQUENCE

The association's executive committee has approved the following tagging colour sequence for the next seven years.

2021 – GREEN

2022 – BLUE

2023 – ORANGE

2024 – WHITE

2025 – PINK

2026 – BROWN

2027 – PURPLE

2020 Sale results in detail (average prices)

WELSHPOOL		2020	2019
September:	Yearlings	167.01	143.63
	Ewe lambs	116.42	99.23
October:	Yearlings	158.38	130.10
	Ewe lambs	96.49	83.76
BULTH WELLS / HEREFORD			
September:	Yearlings	173.43	150.05
	Ewe lambs	115.71	96.86
October:	Yearlings	136.21	125.72
	Ewe lambs	99.20	84.33
RUTHIN			
	Yearlings	162.11	129.72
	Ewe lambs	98.16	84.03

Progress for cooperation to promote Mule sheep

Back in May 2020, a Group was set up with the support of the five main Mule societies, the Welsh, North of England, Scotch, Cheviot and Highland as well as the Blue-faced Leicester Association to promote the benefits of Mule sheep for finished lamb production. Clearly the impact of Covid made things difficult to communicate with representatives from each association but by attending Zoom meetings, the Group was able to push ahead.

The cancellation of all the agricultural events meant that there was a vacuum of news. This was an opportunity too good to miss and the story of cooperation was picked up by the farming press. A Facebook page was initiated to publicise the success of commercial Mules which gave the Group the opportunity to drive home the message that "Mules make money".

The Group has made good strides in getting Mules back in front of the farming press, with features and articles in nearly every farming paper. The main aim of the Group was to highlight the benefits of Hybrid vigour, adaptability and profitability that Mules bring to the industry and ensure that these benefits were promoted consistently.

While there are things that may have been done differently, the fact of the matter is that people have been reading about all types of Mules regularly in the farming press and that must be a good thing.

The Group has also challenged some of the current thinking in the sheep industry, particularly with the help of Donagh Berry, a geneticist from Southern

Ireland. Donagh has highlighted that Blue-faced Leicesters are genetically different from nearly all other breeds. They have the ability, to inject unrivalled hybrid vigour into any type of Mule. This explains why they have such good maternal traits and performance compared to other breeds and crosses. Whilst Hybrid vigour has been talked about for years, it has recently been less in the forefront of the industry as the critical benefit of the stratification system. Donagh's work has given the hybrid vigour argument a real boost.

The Group has also challenged the trend towards "ewe efficiency" which claims that this will lead to ewes rearing their own body weight of lamb in a period being deemed to be efficient when, in reality, it may just lead to smaller ewes and consequently smaller carcasses and lower income.

Clearly with sales of all types of Mules regularly hitting the headlines, it would appear that Mules continue to be the sheep of choice for commercial farmers.

Commenting on the Group's potential to support the Welsh Mules, association vice-chairman, Richard Thomas said "The association believes that the Mule Group can make an important contribution to raise the profile of Mule sheep, including the Welsh Mule. It complements our promotional activity and that of other Mule Groups really well."

Group member Derek Hall added "Going forward there are many challenges that we would like to address, we would welcome any feedback and suggestions that members may have, to further the success of the Group."

Sales Report 2020

The Welsh Mule Sheep Breeders Association's September sales saw steady trade throughout with strong demand for both yearling ewes and ewe lambs.

The yearling ewes at Welshpool on 9th Sept saw prices increase from 2019 levels to an average of £167 with H & E Powell, Llwyngwilym, Rhayader topping the market at £235 for a pen of ewes sold to R P Richards, Glanlerry, Borth. The following day, ewe lambs averaged £116, up £18 on the previous year with W Jones, Maes Y Deri, Ffair Fach receiving the best price at £200 from R A Jones, Red Gwenthrew, Sarn, Powys.



The association held a sale in Hereford for the first time on 11th September as coronavirus regulations made it more difficult to hold its Builth Wells sale as normal. Prices for both yearlings and ewe lambs were up from 2019. Yearling ewes averaged £173.43, with the top price of £245 again being gained by H&E Powell, Llwyngwilym, Rhaeadr for a pen bought by G Price, Parc y Deri, Aberystwyth. Ewe lambs averaged £115.71 with Wyn Jones, Maes y Deri, Llandeilo receiving the best price at £192 from H&E Powell, Llwyngwilym, Rhaeadr.

Ruthin continued the trend of improved prices and buoyant demand. Yearling ewes averaged £162, with the top price of £182 being gained by H.C. & T.C. Hughes, Llangwyfan Farm, Denbigh for a pen bought by R & S Rogers, Cae Ffynon, Abbeylands. Ewe lambs averaged £98 up £14 on 2019 with GW & SE Jones, Cae Goronwy, Llansanan, Denbigh receiving the best price at £142 from T Anwyl Williams, Parciau, Bryn Celyn, Pentraeth.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions it was not possible to hold competitions for best sheep on display at any of the venues.

The October sales of Welsh Mule breeding sheep also followed the same trend.

Yearlings at Welshpool averaged £158, up £28 on 2019 with the top price of £170 achieved by WC & JM Gittins, Ashton Farm, Castell Caereinion for a pen sold to GW & BA Haynes, Trefnant Isaf, Maesmawr, Powys. Ewe lambs

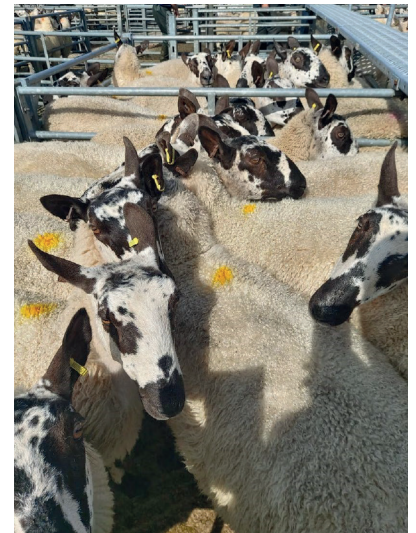


averaged £97 each, up £13 with EP Hughes & Son, Porth, Llananno obtaining the best return of £128 for sheep purchased by D I Roberts & Son, Stingwern, Brooks.

Yearlings at the association's sale in Hereford averaged £136 with the top price of £150 obtained by RE Evans, Nant y Gward, Swansea, sold to Messrs D Rees & Son, Neuadd Domas Farm, Maesteg, Nr Bridgend while ewe lambs averaged £99 with the top price being £142 for a pen sold by RG & BM Jones & Son, Ty Mawr, Garth, to Mr G Scrivens, Harpers Hill Farm, Henley in Arden, Warks

Association chairman Kevin Parry was grateful for the help and support of auctioneers, vendors and buyers for their help and support in ensuring that the sales went ahead in such tough circumstances due to the Covid 19 pandemic. "We're very grateful to all concerned for their efforts in arranging this year's sales at a difficult time. Buyers pleased with their purchases and returns have been good making the extra effort worthwhile."

For the full sale results visit the association website: www.welshmules.co.uk



Obituary: Mike Rees

We were all very sad to learn that the association's President, Mike Rees, Upper Pentre, Llanbister had passed away recently.

Mike was one of the early pioneers of the association and made a tremendous contribution to our success. He'd served on the executive committee for many years but was always willing to help in whatever capacity required. He was happy to judge at shows, to inspect at sales, to serve on the executive committee or be present at the association's stand at demonstrations. While he was reluctant to stand on public platforms, he

was exceptionally good at promoting the Welsh Mules and discussing its advantages with small groups of farmers and potential buyers, young and old at open days or other events.

Mike was widely respected as a farmer for the quality of what he produced but also as a man for the strength of his character, his willingness to put his shoulder to the wheel, to do what he believed was right – and for his wicked sense of humour! He'll be sadly missed. Our thoughts are with his family and many friends at this sad time.

Field Officer Report

After a very difficult year to start my new post as field officer I am very please to say that all went better than I ever expected. Firstly, I would like to thank all the auction markets for continuing to run smooth operated sales under the COVID-19 situation.

Also, I thank the vendors for their cooperation in presenting an excellent show of breeding ewes and lambs in all categories as can be seen in the report.

Personally, I would like to thank you all for making my post as pleasurable as possible this year it has most definitely been a new and difficult experience for all concerned.

I look forward to what we all hope and certain to be a better twelve months ahead and look forward to working with you all. Please contact me if you need information on anything within the society.

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Email: whejones@hotmail.com



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YOUR CONTACTS WITH THE WELSH MULES

Field Officer: **Will Jones 07854 600667**

Secretaries can be contacted on **(01970) 636688**

Our website address is: **www.welshmules.co.uk**

Email: **info@welshmules.co.uk**

The association's official auctioneers can be contacted at:

For the Welshpool sale:

Welshpool Livestock Sales; Buttington Cross, Welshpool, SY21 8SR. (01938) 553438

For the Builth Wells sale:

Builth Market Auctioneers: Market Office, The Smithfield, Builth Wells, LD2 3ED. 01982 553228

For the Ruthin sale:

Vale of Clwyd Livestock Market; Plas Glastir, Ruthin LL15 1PB (01824) 702025

Jones Peckover; 1 The Roe, St Asaph, (01745) 583260



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For the 2021 sales, ewe lambs must be tagged with a **YELLOW electronic tag in the left ear and a **GREEN** coloured tag in the right ear.**