



The Natural Fibre Company

News up-date

Spring

2010



Jake
in his
prime

Jake was one of our first four sheep. He was bought as a wether lamb for grass cutting and wool production, but became the father of the Blacker Sheep flock.

His good feet, teeth, fleece, greed and self-interest kept him happily munching for 14 years. In return, he gave us around 40 kg of lovely fleece.

But he was arthritic and fell over. We got him up and spoiled him, but he kept falling. He might have gone on, but was struggling so much that in March he went in the knacker's van.

Having sheep was what led to our involvement in The Natural Fibre Company, so Jake started it all.

Alpaca industry faces tubercular threat

It has become apparent that alpacas are susceptible to tuberculosis. The alpaca world has taken the news seriously and is holding briefing days with veterinary advice on hand.

It's likely to be a gruelling process, with plenty of uncertainty due to the variable accuracy of the tests.

We hope that the risk of tuberculosis will not deter alpaca owners, because it's vitally important for the future of the industry to manage the situation and reduce the spread.

Bio security will become a more important topic, but it's also a time when people need to support each other and work together.

It's said that good health increases resistance, so keeping your herd in peak condition is a worthwhile investment.

Fly strike and Bluetongue

After the long, cold winter we're all looking forward to some warm weather, but if and when it arrives it will also bring flies - and inevitably fly strike.

Observation is very important and can save lives. Please do not send us fleece which contains anti-fly-strike pesticides as our effluent rules prevent us from processing it for you.

We are happy to pass on any news regarding fly traps and would be very interested to hear your experiences.

Bluetongue may have disappeared from the headlines, but the disease has not! Please keep vaccinating.

Higher costs force price rise

Analysis of our production costs has shown that we need to charge the same for twisted hanks as for balls of yarn, so prices have been raised with immediate effect.

As all our costs have also risen, we will be reluctantly forced to pass these on: get your fleece in early to benefit from current price levels.

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Effluent checks hint at possible overdosing

We monitor the effluent from scouring on a random basis, but always check it with an organic scour.

As our effluent does not go to the sewage system, but is hauled away and deposited on licensed, slow draining land, where it bio-degrades gradually, we can be more relaxed.

Monitoring

But as we are disposing of waste we have to monitor it. Remember that since October 2008 wool fibre is defined as hazardous waste.

It is, therefore, with some concern that we have seen the levels of pesticide residue in our effluent rising steadily.

This, together with the COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand: not a problem for us as our effluent does not go

directly into watercourses and as sludge is a useful fertilizer) is an issue for everybody processing fibre.

More efficient scouring, using less water, inevitably creates a more concentrated result.

Key pesticides

The table below gives the results on key pesticides in micrograms per litre (i.e.1/1,000,000 of a gram (1×10^{-6}), or 1/1,000 of a milligram).

A sample taken in November 2008 showed 968 micrograms of chlorfenvinfos which has been banned for over 10 years!

Although the amounts are still very small, unless there is a '<' beside the number, it exceeds the minimum reporting level for ground water

requirements in landfill sites, though in some cases this is because the laboratory cannot measure very tiny quantities.

We meet the requirements on the other parameters of analysis, which include other chemicals, metal residues and so on.

The results are odd. First, they are mainly taken when we have an organic scour, so they reflect organic practice, and second, they show an upward trend almost everywhere.

Clearly, the ability of pesticide manufacturers to make their chemicals last in the fleece is considerable. Unless, that is, all our customers habitually 'disinform' us on their compliance forms, which we do not believe.

Overdosing

We think that first you are probably over-dosing, second you should please NOT use containers you find at the back of the barn, and third, you are probably spending more than you need.

If the residues are there, and the animals are still getting fly-strike, then the chemicals are both potentially damaging to the environment and ineffective.

Date	Cypermethrin	Deltamethrin	Diazinon
June 2006	43.3	4.99	119
November 2006	707	<2.0	<10.0
February 2007	269	38.8	14.4
April 2007	85.9	23.8	<0.5
May 2007	118	<20	221
August 2007	<20	<20	<0.5
March 2008	85.9	23.8	<0.5
July 2008	349	<20	187
November 2008	219	<20	695



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Blacker Designs: growing and learning....

Our yarns and patterns are selling well and we now know the parameters of our range, in terms of breeds and colours. We will ensure that we have 4-ply, DK and aran/chunky in the main breeds, but also have some breeds as 'guest beers' rather than all the time.

We have plenty of fleece in stock and will not be buying until the summer. The exception is Black Welsh Mountain, which we will buy in limited quantities, provided it's untreated and of shearing quality.

If there are particular yarns you would like us to make, please contact us and we will see what can be done. We are already planning some sock yarns and more dyed colours.

We have added several patterns, which have proved popular so far and more are on the way. And as a number of customers have asked, we are planning to add sleeves to the Sleeveless Cardy with the cable design on the back.

If you want a particular pattern please ask, but remember that it will take time as everything has to be test knitted and then photographed.

The textiles have also been selling well and we have placed our weaving orders for next season. Watch for some innovations in terms of thicker mats and rugs, other items and accessories.

A face-lift (website not us!)

Our current website was launched in November 2008, but already needs updating. To make things easier we are going to split our knitting yarns from the other products.

We are also looking at different ways for customers to search for a particular kind of yarn.

For the NFC side of the site we are keen to increase our commission service and want to get a stronger message across to farmers about how we can add value to their fleece.

Research questionnaire

Thank you for completing our recent market research questionnaire. The results are being collated and will be published in the next newsletters.

Special Offer for Newsletter Readers: 10% off coupon.

When you order goods on the website, you can enter NEWS1 in the coupon box in the checkout to get 10% off your order before postage costs. Only for the first 200 orders, so hurry!

Give us the needle to help charity!

We know there are thousands, if not millions, of needles lying around at the bottom of cupboards, drawers and workbaskets – unloved, un-used and unwanted.

There are loads in charity shops, too. This is a shame as they are mostly useable. Please collect them and send them to us as we are planning to launch some knitting kits.

It will save us buying new, imported needles (none are made in this country), recycles good tools and thus helps the environment.

As it saves us from buying needles, we will instead give 25p for every pair of serviceable needles we receive to the Cornwall based disaster relief charity, Shelterbox – see <http://www.shelterbox.org>

If you sort and label them, this will save us doing it and we will then give 30p a pair to Shelterbox.

To encourage knitting we also give re-cycled knitting needles to schools and other groups. Crochet hooks next



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Spring is when things change - so watch out!

When the lambs come we know it's spring; lambs, kids and cria are the future of our flocks and herds and we have taken care to get the breeding right, the diet right, everything right.

But things can still go wrong: if some weakly offspring do not survive, if mums don't make it or if what we planned for the next generation doesn't come off.

So it is vital to watch them. Close observation, and knowing your animals, will mean that you will at once know when things are not right.

With pregnant animals the next thing is action. It's all very well to let a limp go untreated for a few days, but odd behavior in late pregnancy: not wanting to eat, standing away from the others or actual symptoms of illness all need instant attention.

A good book, a good neighbour and a good vet are key. If you can diagnose, with or without the book or neighbour, and order a treatment, it will be quicker and cost less than calling the vet out.

Watching a small flock by the house is easy, but it should be a twice-daily discipline for pregnant animals, once daily

for all stock where ever they are. Once lambing starts, of course, you have to be there as often as necessary.

Ensure they get the right diet in a timely manner. Lambs take up lots of space, so it's easier for a ewe to eat twice a day in smaller quantities than once a day, and also easier if the food is in a spacious feeder which cuts down the jostling to get it.

Additives, like vitamins, malt licks, mineral blocks and fresh water all help. In the four to six weeks before lambing, keep the disturbance to a minimum. If you're shearing or vaccinating, do it earlier.

Wool project

The Prince of Wales, with support from the National Sheep Association and the wool trade, has launched The Wool Project, an initiative aimed at bringing more wool into fashion and furnishings.

It was launched with a blaze of publicity which included, among others, Marks & Spencer and John Lewis.

A national Wool Week is planned for the autumn to coincide with London Fashion Week.

This is great news for us all – additional promotion of the best high performance natural fibres can only help.

Lamb prices have risen 30% over the last two years – let's see if wool prices do the same.

Dates for the diary

- WonderWool Wales at the Royal Welsh Showground, Llanellwedd, Builth Wells, Powys LD2 3SY, 24-25 April;
- Sherborne Castle Country Fair at Sherborne Castle, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 3PY, 31 May;
- Royal Cornwall Show at the Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge, 10-12 June;
- Woolfest at the Lakeland Agricultural Centre, Cockermouth, Cumbria CA13 0QQ, 25-26 June;
- iKnit at the Royal Horticultural Halls & Conference Centre, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE, early September;
- UK Ravelry Knit Camp and day at Stirling University, 9-14 August. For those that don't know, Ravelry is an on-line, international community of knitters; and
- The Smallholders Country Fair and Farmer's Market at the Royal Cornwall Showground, Wadebridge, 21 August.

Blacker Sheep Ltd trading as the Natural Fibre Company and Blacker Designs.

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