

GERAINT POWELL, Nuffield Scholar

I departed for the USA on the 3 September and will be spending a month over there for the first of my individual travels as part of my Nuffield scholarship. I flew into Minneapolis then picked up a hire car for a 4,000 mile road trip from Minnesota into North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska then through Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania to Albany in New York State. I will be spending time with ranchers involved with the Grazing Lands Coalitions in their respective states. These coalitions are state-funded organisations providing farmers with the application of scientific research and knowledge transfer of agricultural practices through farmer education. Coalition members have a very strong focus on the importance of managing soil health and system biodiversity, implementing new technologies that improve soil health, increase productivity and profitability, reduce input costs and integrate livestock and crops in a whole farm systems approach. All of which is key to sustainable farming.



It will be interesting when visiting these ranchers to observe their grazing techniques and how they balance productivity, diversity and soil health but at the same time be profitable with a strong focus on market orientation. They are operating in a different situation to ourselves, where our environmental stewardship grazing is very prescriptive with payment claimed.

As well as rancher visits, I will be attending educational events and conferences. While in North Dakota, I will be going on a State University Extension Service field trip. This two-day trip will include demonstrations of growing and grazing cover crops, fencing and watering techniques, integration of cover crops into crop rotations, and crop residue and soil health management.

In mid-September I am booked on the South Dakota Grassland Coalition annual grazing school. This three-day course is designed for producers and anyone with an interest in learning how to best manage grasslands to benefit livestock. The agenda features presenters from state and federal agencies and universities. Local producers will share their expertise about various topics related to grazing techniques and grassland management.

I finish my trip at the GrassFed Exchange Conference in Albany. It is a gathering of regenerative ranchers, dairymen and sustainable food advocates from across the world who come together to network and exchange ideas.

On the farm here, the season has gone pretty well. Good weather at lambing resulted in a good number of lambs,



although we got very dry post lambing (5mm rain in five weeks) which resulted in some sheep being short of feed into May. Then the rain came and soil temperatures rose and in no time they were wading in grass. Like a lot of people, we went from no grass to too much in a matter of weeks!

Our Aberfield ewe lamb collection day at the end of July went well, with an abundance of lambs hitting the required weight. Lambs are put into weight groups and customers purchase a proportion of each weight group. Ewes will be sorted back into their tupping groups and second shorn next month ready for the process to start again.