

BETTER Farm update December 2017

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Paddock closing rates on the lowland BETTER farms as of the end of November is ranging from 50% to 100% depending on planned lambing date and farm type. As paddocks are closed for the winter a closing grass height is taken (target 3.5 - 4 cm) and all farms will do a final farm cover in early to mid- December. An important part in managing grass supplies during the year has been the removal of surplus grass for silage during the grazing season and currently samples are being taken from these silages for analysis. Initial report from the first samples taken indicated that silage quality (DMD) would appear to be back slightly on last year.

After a difficult year for finishing lambs across the BETTER farms lamb numbers are starting to get small on all the farms with most of the lowland flocks selling lambs every 7-10 days at the moment. For three of the hill flocks a relatively low store price meant indoor finishing of lambs became a more viable option where facilities were suitable. As with the lowland flocks these flocks are selling lambs regularly at the moment and the number of lambs remaining on the farms is getting low.

At the time of writing rams are being pulled out of most of the lowland flocks with the target being for a 6-7 week lambing spread. Mating will continue on the BETTER hill sheep farms until mid-December. Four of the flocks carried out single sire mating again this year on some of their ewes using Cheviot and S. Blackface which will generate valuable progeny performance data. All single sire mating groups will be joined together after at least 17 days for the repeat cycle. Ewe body condition score and live weight varied across the flocks with flocks in the North West having a lower BCS than desired, most likely as a result of the poor weather conditions in this part of the country since August.