

## **BETTER Farm update October 2017**

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The mid-season lowland flocks will be joining rams to the flock from early this month (mostly between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of October) with most of the flocks aiming to start lambing during the first week in March to match grass growth on the farm. The farms are reporting that ewe condition is generally good with thin ewes separated off for preferentially feeding prior to mating. All ewes and the replacements in the flock will be weighed condition scored before joining and those that have failed to improve in condition will be culled. A number of the flocks will be using rams from the INZAC (Ireland New Zealand Animal Comparison) project this year and single sire mating will be used in order to evaluate the performance of the progeny off these rams. Single sire mating groups will be collapsed into bigger groups or rams swapped over after 17 days though to mitigate the effects of sub fertile or infertile rams.

All the flocks including the hill flocks have at this stage picked out their replacement ewe lambs with some of the lowland flocks planning to breed these this year. Given the wet weather and poor grass utilisation in parts during September most of the farms intending to breed their ewe lambs are supplementing these lambs to try ensuring lambs don't stop growing and flush lambs. The target will be to have all ewe lambs at a minimum of 60% of mature body weight at mating. Following a FECPAK analysis lambs will be dosed prior to mating also.

Grass growth rates in September were good generally despite problems utilising this grass due to the wet weather in some areas. Autumn time also signals the beginning of planning for next year's grazing with the farms starting to plan what order they intend to close up paddocks for next spring. The target will be to start closing paddocks in rotation 120 days prior to target turn out date. For the flock in Co. Wexford this process has already begun with a section of the farm marked off for the ewes due to lamb in January. These paddocks are being closed off already in order to ensure sufficient covers for mid-January.