

BETTER Farm update September 2016

Frank Campion, AGRIC

Attention on the BETTER sheep farms is turning to the breeding season with the selection of replacement ewes and rams top of the agenda. As with previous years the lowland flocks will carry out single sire mating so that the parentage of some can be identified. This data will then be fed back to Sheep Ireland and used to evaluate the current breeding indexes. Replacement ewes are selected based on the lambs breed and the breeding policy in place on the farm. Consideration will also be given to the lambs' growth rate to 7 weeks of age to try and select replacements from the ewes with the highest milk production ability. Four of the lowland flocks breed their replacements as ewe lambs with the target of all ewe lambs put to the ram being at least 45 kg live weight and having a BCS of 3.5 or greater. The suitability of ewes currently in the flock for breeding is being assessed across the farms currently. Thin ewes will be selected out and given preferential access to grass over other ewes in order try and build their BCS prior to joining.

Drafting of lambs for slaughter continues with drafting rates varying across the flocks. Remaining lambs are still being given access to high quality grass first with target residency periods of 3-4 days. As lamb numbers drop this is freeing up grass to prepare ewes for joining. Grass growth rates have declined over the past 2 - 3 weeks (Figure 1) and target days ahead are being extended to 20 days from the start of September. At present most farms have a surplus of grass but this will change quickly as growth rates drop off. Autumn grazing plans are being worked out on the farms with aim to be closing paddocks in rotation from 120 days prior to the start of turn out next spring.

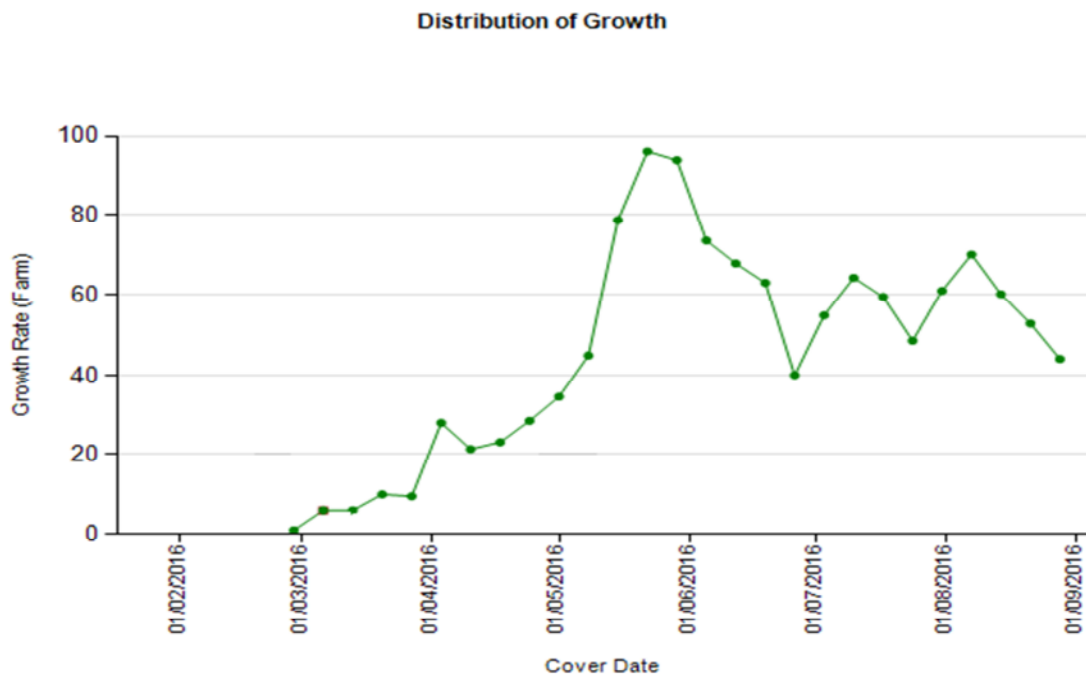


Figure 1. Distribution of grass growth on BETTER sheep farms from March to August this year.