

BETTER Farm update November 2017

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Poor weather conditions during October made it difficult for some of the farms to get good grass utilisation and graze out covers correctly. For one of the heavier farms ewes were divided into smaller groups pre-mating to try and improve the utilisation of grass and reduce damage to the swards. For long periods of October all the lowland flocks had the ewes divided days to facilitate single sire mating. These groups are then collapsed into larger groups after days 17 days to reduce risks from exposure to infertile/sub fertile rams. Ewe BCS for the most part has been within acceptable ranges (Table 1.) but was lower than last year on some farms as result of the very wet conditions and difficulties getting heavy covers grazed out throughout August/September. Reports from the mid-season flocks though suggest that mating has gone well during the first two-three weeks since the rams were joined. Focus for these flocks during November will be to maintain the ewe on a good plane of nutrition while also getting paddocks grazed out and closed off to allow covers to build for next spring.

Table 1. Average ewe live weight and ewe BCS at mating for three of the lowland BETTER sheep farms

Flock	Kearney	O'Leary	Prendergast	Doyle	Dunne
County	Louth	Kerry	Mayo	Wexford	Wicklow
Average ewe live weight (kg)	82.3	75.5	72.3	71.1	70.0
Average ewe BCS	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.25	3.25

The early lambing flock in Co. Wexford scanned during October with 67% of ewes joined scanning in lamb. These ewes were joined for a single mating cycle only following sponging and mated to Suffolk and Texel rams. Of the ewes scanned in lamb litter size was 1.87 and ewes not in lamb at scanning have been added to the mid-season ewes for mating.

November means mating time for the hill flocks and initial reports suggest that ewe condition is lower than desired. Wet conditions are also making it difficult to graze the lower better quality grass with thinner ewes for some farms. A relatively low price for store lambs in marts has meant finishing some of the lambs indoors this year for several flocks. While not suited to every farm it is hoped that

finishing some of the lambs on farm with the low store price on offer will leave a better margin for the farms.