

Hill Sheep Farm Walk
September 11th 2018
Farm of David & Linda McLaughlin,
Shroove, Co. Donegal.

 An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

**This is a Department approved Knowledge
Transfer Sheep Event**

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Introduction

We welcome you to today's event on the farm of David and Linda McLaughlin. The McLaughlin's operate sheep and cattle farm with a both hill and lowland sheep flocks. Today's walk will focus on his hill sheep enterprise and some of the key elements that allow the McLaughlin's to run a high performance hill sheep flock. Today's walk will focus on four main areas:

- Farm layout and structure
- Hill grazing management
- Flock breeding policy
- Lamb performance and options for finishing hill lambs

Each of these stands will provide you with an opportunity to engage with the speakers on a variety of topics, which we encourage you to avail of. This is a national qualifying event for the Knowledge Transfer Programme (year 3) and we would encourage participants to ensure they register with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at the event. Finally, we would like thank the McLaughlin family for their continued participation in the Sheep BETTER farm programme and opening their farm today.

Farm Details

- **Farm system - Mixed grazing Sheep & Suckers**
 - **Sheep enterprise**
 - **Hill flock ~250 ewes + replacements**
 - Lambled from April 5th onwards
 - **Lowland flock ~100 ewes + replacements**
 - High output system
 - Lambled from 17th March onwards
 - **Beef enterprise**
 - 17 Autumn calved suckler cows + followers

Farm Plan – Key elements

Hill Flock

- Maintain the hill flock at 250 ewes + ewe lamb replacements
- Lambled 5th April onwards
- Target ewe output of 1.1 lambs reared per ewe to the ram
- Produce crossbred lambs Belclare-X both for sale and as replacements for the lowland flock
- Forage based production

Hill Flock Performance

Table 1. Performance of hill flock in 2009, 2017 and 2018

	2009	2017	2018
No ewes mated	223	252	253
Litter size	87	92	85
Ewes lambled (%)	1.2	1.4	1.3
Lambs weaned per ewe joined	0.9	1.1	1.0
Total lambs weaned	201	277	258

- Flock output 2009 vs. 2018
 - Increased output per ewe
 - Increase in ewe numbers
 - Extra 50+ lambs weaned
 - Extra 1200+ kg of lamb carcass produced.
- Combined effects:
 - Increased output per ewe
 - Increase in ewe numbers

Lamb Performance

- High levels of lamb performance
- Targeted management of lamb crop at weaning
 - Based on prices and lamb weights

Table 2. Average lamb weaning weights (kg) for 2018

Birth Type	Birth Weight (kg)	7 Week Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)
1	4.5	18.2	27.9
2	4.3	16.1	25.6

Table 3. Breakdown of lamb weaning weights in 2018

Breakdown of weaning weights	
Category	%
<25 kg	30
25–30 kg	52
30–35 kg	16
>35 kg	2

Hill Grazing Management

David McLaughlin - Hill Farm Grazing Management Practices

- Hill flock is grazed on the Shroove blocks, with this block also used to produce silage and graze lowland stock for a few days post lambing/calving
- Fields rested for grazing hill ewes pre-mating, pre- & post-lambing, & for lambs post-weaning
- Hill ewes are not housed, except in unusual circumstances and are generally not fed silage/hay
- 5 Belted Galloway suckler cows used to manage Heather

McLaughlin's Hill 'Sheep Year'

1. Weaning to Mating

- Ewes weaned on August 15th, strong ewes go back to Hill (plot 5), and lambs graze fields 7, 8, 13 & 14. Thin ewes and cull ewes kept and grazed on fields. Ram lambs are introduced to meal feeding in late August/early September, and then moved to ad lib feeding until sale (cost of €30/lamb)
- Mid-September - cull ewes and lambs sold. Replacement hogget's are grazed on plot 4 and thinner ewes graze plot 2. Ewe lambs graze plots 7 & 8 with the ram lambs on field 13 / housed.

2. Mating to Lambing

- November Mating - Ewes are single sired mated on fields 2, 7, 8, 9, and 10.
- December 18th - February 10th ewes graze block 5. High energy Feed Buckets used (approx. 1 tonne/ 25 buckets). 5 buckets set out initially and replaced as used.
- February 10th, Scanning and post scanning the singles (140-170) stay on block 5 with the twins (70-80) going to (rested) fields 2/11 or housed if necessary. Singles get Feed Buckets until late January and are fed Cobs on the ground every second day until lambing. The twin ewes are fed every day on an 18% CP ration.
- Lambing. Single ewes brought to fields 9 & 10 on April 1st and go to fields 7 & 8 after lambing (tagged etc.). Twin bearing ewes are lambed on fields 15 and 16 and go to fields 13 and 14 getting grass only post lambing.

3. Lambing to Weaning

- May 10th Fields 7, 13 & 14 fertilised for silage. By May 15th singles move to block 5, the twins move to field 2 & then to 8 with fields 7 13 and 14 being used when the silage is cut in late June.

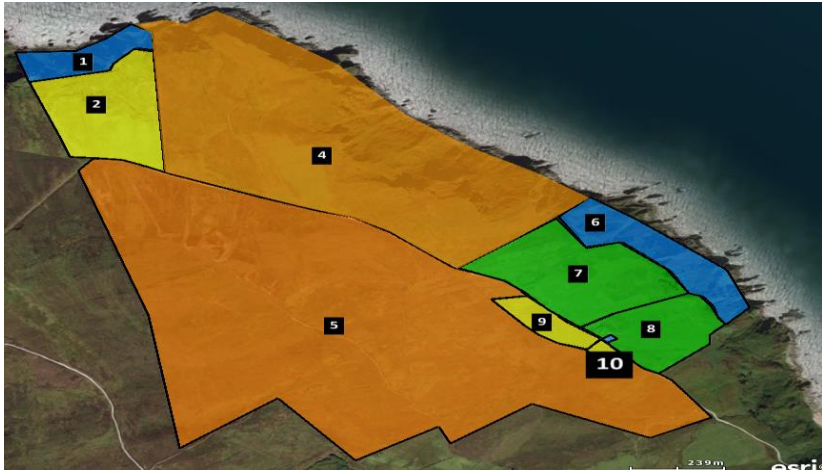


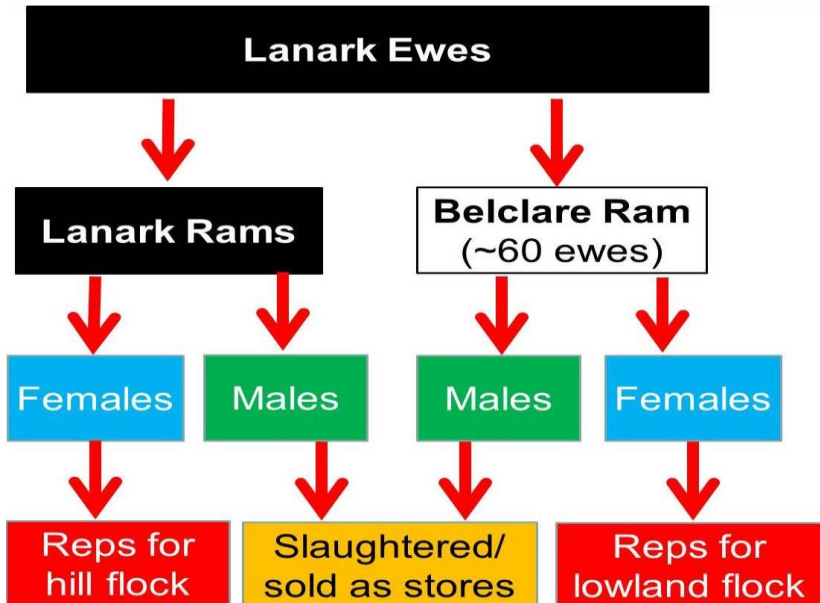
Figure 1. Map Showing the 'Hill' Unit Grazing Blocks on McLaughlin's Farm

Key To Map	
1	Unused for sheep
2	Hill
3	Improved Hill
4	Green Fields



Figure 2. Map of Farm Showing the 'Home' unit on McLaughlin's Farm

Breeding Policy



- Cross breeding 60 ewes to produce replacements for lowland flock
- Pure-bred Lanark rams bred from within and purchased
- Average ewe live weight of ~53 kg
- Cull ewes sent to lowland flock for last crop
 - Produce Mules for Donegal Mule group