Sheep BETTER Farms – Lowland scanning results

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Nutrition during late pregnancy has a major influence on lamb birth weight and subsequent performance. Scanning is an important tool for nutritional management in late pregnancy. The lowland flocks involved in the BETTER Farm Sheep Programme have all completed scanning. This information, together with forage analysis is being used to devise their concentrate feeding programme for late pregnancy. Ewes have been grouped according to litter size and expected lambing date. The scanning results for the flocks are summarised in Table 1.

The scanning results also provide an assessment of flock productivity. For each of these flocks the targets are: litter size of over 1.9 and for 95% of the ewes joined to lamb. The average scanned litter size for this season is greater than last year (+0.1). An issue identified during the past two seasons for a number of the flocks was the low percentage of ewes lambed per ewe joined was well below target levels (86 – 91.5 %). Based on this year scanning results the level of barren ewes is less than 3%, the scanned pregnancy rate this is 1.6 percentage points better than the previous season. Therefore all of the flocks are in a position to achieve the target of 95 % of ewes lambing per ewe joined. This is a significant improvement in this aspect of flock performance.

The predicted litter size from scanning will not always equate to the number of lambs actually born. Litter size may have been either under or over estimated for individual ewes or some late foetal mortality (rare) may occur. We examined the scanning and lambing results from previous years on the lowland Better Farms to get an indication of how sensitive the scanning process is on-farm. Scanning sensitivity for ewes with twins can be defined as follows: percentage of ewes with twins that are correctly identified at scanning. The data presented in Table 2 illustrates that the results at scanning are approximately 93% accurate.

Key Points: 1. Both litter size (+0.1) and the percentage of ewes pregnant at scanning (+1.6%) is up this year.

2. Scanning is a fairly accurate process however on commercial farms approximately 7 % of litters are misdiagnosed.

3. Scanning results provide extremely useful information; this combined with forage analysis should form the basis of nutritional management during late pregnancy.

Table 1. Scanning results from the lowland sheep BETTER Farms

	Flocks			
	1	2	3	4
Scanning rate	1.72	1.80	1.78	1.94
Scanned litter size	1.76	1.83	1.84	2.00
Pregnancy rate at scanning (%)	98	98	97	97

Table 2. Sensitivity of scanning: percentage of results diagnosed correctly

Scanned litter size	Correctly diagnosed
1	93.3
2	92.2
3+	93.2