

Farm of
Tomás O’Leary
Rosnacarton,
Co. Kerry



This is a DAFM approved Knowledge Transfer Sheep Event

Introduction

We welcome you to today's event where you will hear about the on-going changes on Tomás O'Leary's farm as part of his involvement in the Sheep BETTER farm Programme. Tomás operates a sheep and beef farm of 300 lambing ewes and also finishes Friesian steers and Continental cross heifers. The changes implemented on the farm since Tomás joined the BETTER farm program in 2014 have helped improve the efficiency and output from the flock as you will hear in more detail today.

There are 4 stands which will discuss:

Farm layout, farm plan and flock performance,

Flock breeding,

Grazing infrastructure and grassland management,

Lamb and cattle performance

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 do. This is a national qualifying event for the Knowledge Transfer Programme (Year 1) 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 to conclude by thanking the O'Leary family for their continued participation in the Sheep BETTER farm programme and opening their farm today.

Michael Gottstein,

Head of Teagasc Sheep Programme.

Kevin O'Sullivan,

Teagasc B & T Advisor, Co. Kerry,

Farm Details

Farm details

- 44.9 adjusted ha
- 2 main blocks

Readrinagh, Headford (home farm)

– 14.8 ha adj. mainly used for silage, heavy soil

Rosnacarton, Beaufort

– 30.1 ha adj. main grazing farm

- Mixed grazed beef and sheep farm
 - 300 breeding ewes (including replacements)
 - Beef cattle (currently changing system)
 - 41 Friesian steers purchased at ~18 months old in October 2016 for finishing at 28 months old
 - 25 weanling Limousin & Charolais cross heifers bought in October 2016 for finishing at 20 months
 - Sheep system yielding a gross margin of €989 per hectare in 2016
 - Cattle system yielding a gross margin of €1,126/ha in 2016

Farm Plan

Target to achieve a farm gross margin in excess of €1000 per hectare

- Increase farm stocking rate
- Increase ewe numbers
- Targeted breeding plan for ewe flock
- Change of beef system
- Improve grassland management
 - Address soil fertility issues
 - Increase number of grazing divisions
 - Implement reseeding programme
 - Use grass budgeting to match supply and demand
- Improve animal performance

Sheep System

Ewe breed: Belclare X Suffolk

Ram Breeds: Belclare, Suffolk & Charollais

System management

Mature ewe flock

- Lambled from 1st of March
- Belclare, Suffolk rams used on mature ewes
- No supplementation offered during main part of grazing season
- Managed in 2 groups
- Light lambs supplemented with concentrates from September/October onwards
- Some lambs stored over winter and sold from February to April
- Approximately 50% of lambs sold through Ring of Kerry Quality Lamb group

Yearlings

- Lambled from 17th March
- Charollais rams used
- Managed as separate group
- Lambs supplemented with 0.125kg/day concentrates.

Artificially reared lambs

- Lamb feeder used 'EWE 2'
- Target 12.5 – 13.5 kg milk powder per lamb
- Lambs split on basis of age
- Weaned once consuming 250g/day conc. for 3 consecutive days (approx. 5 to 7 weeks)
- Managed on grass from weaning until slaughter
- Supplementation continued at grass until mid-June then removed

Flock Performance

Flock performance is summarised for mid-season mature ewe flock in Table 1.

Table 1. Mid-season Mature Ewe Flock Productivity in 2015, 2016 and 2017

	2015	2016	2017
No of ewes joined	133	129	209*
Scanned litter size	2.11	2.27	2.15
Scanned pregnancy rate	96.2	97.6	97.1
Lambs reared per ewe joined	1.84	1.94	1.79
Total number of lambs reared	245	250	374

*No early lambing flock in 2017 these ewes were added to the mid-season flock

Table 2. Yearling flock performance in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

	2015	2016	2017
No of ewes joined	53	84	92
Scanned litter size	1.61	1.60	1.60
Scanned pregnancy rate	92.5	92.9	92.4
Lambs reared per ewe joined	1.22	1.17	1.14
Total number of lambs reared	65	98	105

Table 3. Weaning weights (kg) in 2015, 2016 and 2017 season for mature ewes and yearlings.

Birth type	2015		2016		2017	
	Mature ewes	Yearlings	Mature ewes	Yearlings	Mature ewes	Yearlings
Single	37.8	37.6	32.7	34.4	34.3	34.7
Twin	32.6	30.1	30.1	28.0	30.0	26.5
Triplet	30.1	30.6	26.0	30.1	30.2	26.1

Beef system

Previously operated suckler to beef system

- December calved 100% AI
- Steers finished at 22 - 24 months (housed)
- Heifers finished at 20 months (at grass)

Changed system to heifer finishing system in 2014

- Purchased in September
- Finished at 20 months off grass

2016 introduced Friesian steer finishing system

- Purchased in August/September
- Two months at grass before been housed
- Fed 67% DMD silage & 1.5kg conc/head/day
- Finished off grass from May to August

Why the system change?

- Focused on a more profitable system
- Better grass utilisation
- Fewer grazing groups
- Shorter housing period
- Capable of sustaining higher stocking rate

Table 4. Performance of Friesian steers from autumn 2016 to June 2017.

	Weight (kg)	Average daily gain (kg)
Purchase	430	–
Housing	460	0.86
Turnout	574	0.75
5^{the} June	656	1.14

Table 5. Performance of continental heifers steers from autumn 2016 to June 2017.

	Weight (kg)	Average daily gain (kg)
Purchase	330	–
Housing	330	0
Turnout	405	0.50
5th July	507	0.99

Grassland management

- Rotational grazing system with a mix of cattle and sheep in each group
- Fertilizer plan drawn up and based on soil test results and stocking rate requirements
- PastureBase Ireland programme used to budget grass supplies
- Grass measured using a platometer
- Increased the number of permanent divisions
- Temporary fencing used during grazing season

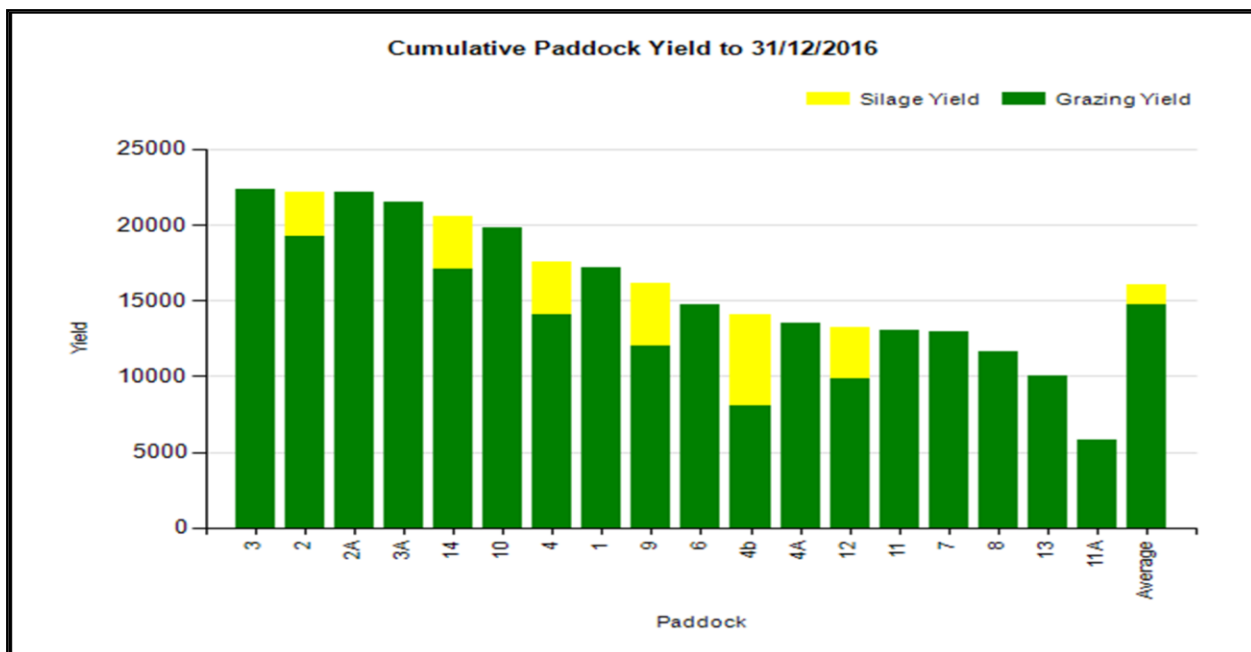


Figure 1. Cumulative paddock grass dry matter yield for 2016 for O’Leary’s farm



Figure 2. Field divisions on Rosnacartan farm.

- 18 paddocks
- Average paddock size ~ 1.7 ha
- Temporary divisions used as required
- Soil fertility monitored
- **Lime** applied in response to soil tests
- Frequent fertilizer application
- Grass growth measured weekly