

Fodder budgeting for sheep farms

If you are short, you still have time to take action

Michael Gottstein
Teagasc Animal and Grassland
Research & Innovation programme

Grow as much grass as you possibly can so that you can extend the grazing season (weather permitting). Continue to spread chemical nitrogen in September to build up grass covers. The earlier that fertiliser is applied, the greater the response will be. That said, when alternative forage sources are expensive then spreading fertiliser even at lower response rates is likely to prove economical.

Best response rates will be achieved on recently reseeded ground and on fields that had late cuts of silage taken off them. The start of the closed period for the spreading of chemical nitrogen and phosphorous has been pushed back from 15 until 30 September. The closed period for spreading slurry has also been deferred and will start on 31 October instead of 15 October.

Make late silage

On farms where grass growth rates have recovered, and surpluses are building, take the opportunity to take out surpluses as baled silage. Weather permitting, try to get a wilt (24 to 48-hour) as late-cut grass tends to be low in dry matter. It goes without saying that with day length shortening you will not get the same speed of drying as in midsummer.

Plan for winter

• **Fodder budget:** do your winter fodder budget to see exactly how you are fixed. One-hundred ewes will require about 23 bales of silage/hay per month. Rams and dry hoggets will eat approximately the same so don't forget to include this in your calculations. Where ewes are housed for three months they will consume about two-thirds of a round bale of silage/hay each.

• **All-concentrate diets:** it is possible to feed ewes on all-concentrate



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diets with limited access to roughage. On this type of diet, the ewes will consume approximately 100kg of concentrates over a 12-week period and the equivalent of 10% of a bale of silage/hay.

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• **Bedding:** depending on how wet the silage is, you will need between half and two-thirds of a round bale of straw per ewe on concrete-floored sheds. At current straw prices and

with lack of supply, alternatives such as woodchip, miscanthus or peat may be options to consider. The economics of these depends largely on transport costs. If you are considering alternative bedding options, but still want straw for lambing pens, then you will need about four to five round bales of straw per 100 ewes in the flock.

Plan for spring 2019

Start to plan your autumn rotation now so that you are grazing your fields/paddocks in the order in which you intend to close them for the winter. Grass will need 120 days rest over the winter so aim to start closing your first fields/paddocks two to three weeks after ram turn-out. Grass is three times more valuable in the spring than in the winter so don't be tempted to eat your spring grass during the winter.