

How Tyfon can reduce meal fed to finishing lambs

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Having lambs in good condition so they grade well, have a high kill-out percentage and good carcase weight can be a struggle. Many sheep farmers run up large meal bills in late autumn in a last-ditch attempt to have lambs fit for slaughter.

The problem is greatest in autumn

time, as grass begins to lose its power to fatten lambs.

Mayo sheep farmers are growing and feeding Tyfon as a solution. The plant is a fast-growing brassica, a hybrid of stubble turnip and Chinese cabbage, high in energy and protein and easily digestible. On the farms of Micheál Conway and David Heraty, Tyfon has been added into a normal grass and clover reseed mix at the rate of 2kg of Tyfon, 10kg of grass and 1kg of clover per acre.

In all cases, the land was sprayed off, eaten bare a week later, disk harrowed and seeded with a one-pass

power harrow and seeder.

The sowing date was chosen so that the crop would have eight weeks of growth before being grazed by weaned lambs. Similarly to the requirements of a grass reseed, the crop was fertilised with 80 units of N, 24 units of P and 130 units of K per acre; 2t/acre of ground lime was also spread at seeding.

These farmers have found that Tyfon improves lamb weight gain pre-slaughter and improves kill-out percentage, resulting in higher carcase weights than when finishing lambs on grass alone.

Micheál and Jonathan Conway

Micheál and his son Jonathan run a flock of 470 purebred Mayo blackface ewes and 50 crossbred ewes, retaining replacements and finishing all lambs, with carcase weights averaging 19kg. The farm selects the best-quality ram lambs to be sold as yearlings at local sales.

On 2 June this year, they reseeded two acres with Tyfon undersown with grass and clover. Due to the drought conditions, the crop found it difficult to establish. Jonathan spread tanks of water on the reseed at night to ensure the crop had every chance to grow.

"Before grazing the Tyfon, all lambs were dosed for worms, given a mineral bullet and wool shorn off both sides of the hind legs and off the tail," says Micheál. "This ensures lambs stay clean and thrive better. On 3 August, two months after sowing, we put 40 spring-born lambs weighing on average 36kg on to the two acres of Tyfon."

Keep rumen working properly

The lambs were given access to a run-back of permanent pasture, to keep their rumen working properly while on the brassica-based diet. "On 10 September, these lambs were sent for slaughter and had an average carcase weight of 21.2kg," says Micheál.

The average liveweight of these lambs at slaughter was 47.5kg. Therefore, the lambs put on 11.5kg on the space of 38 days on the Tyfon, which is an average daily gain of 300g.

The second batch of lambs went



into the Tyfon on 10 September. These lambs also weighed an average of 36kg on entry, had similar liveweight gains to the first group and were slaughtered on 12 October at an average carcase weight of 20kg.

The crop will be grazed for the final time by ewes in mid-pregnancy. Micheál notes that the hill lambs need about two weeks longer in the Tyfon than lowland lambs do.

"It takes the hill lambs longer to develop an appetite for the Tyfon and do not thrive well during the first two weeks," he says.

Micheál also compared the costs of the Tyfon finishing option with the costs of finishing the lambs on meal.

He explained that the cost of sowing the Tyfon was €500 and that if he was to feed meal at grass to finish the lambs, the meal bill would have been €500 too.

"The reason we chose the Tyfon option is that following the last grazing, we have the land reseeded in grass."

The savings on meal costs cancels out the cost of the reseeding programme, essentially allowing Micheál to reseed his land for free.



James Fitzgerald (left) with Tom Staunton.

Tom Staunton

Tom farms in Tourmakeady, and has a flock of 320 Lanark and 30 pedigree Blue Leicester ewes. Blue Leicester rams are crossed with the Lanark flock to produce mules. The mule ewe lambs are sold through the Mayo Mule and Grayface group, while weather lambs are brought to finish on the farm. The best quality purebred Blue Leicester and Lanark ram lambs are selected for breeding and are sold either as lambs or as yearlings.

Two acres of Tyfon and grass were sown in late May. When it came time to graze the crop in late July, Tom put

26 mule wether lambs into the crop and allowed access to a field of after-grass next to the field of Tyfon. The lambs spent a fortnight on the Tyfon and had access to the aftergrass for the full duration.

"I was very impressed with the way the lambs fleshed out in a short period while on the Tyfon," says Tom. "They also seemed to be very healthy on the new diet. The kill-out sheet was also very impressive. The 26 mule lambs had an average kill-out percentage of 45% and an average carcase weight of 20kg. 25 of the 26 lambs were U grade with only 1 R. Tom plans to finish more of his weather lambs on Tyfon next year."

David Heraty

David runs a flock of 150 ewes at Lis-carney, Co Mayo. Of these sheep, 100 are Blackface Mountain and Lanark sheep and the other 50 are mule and Hiltex ewes.

Replacement hill sheep are bred by mating a Blackface mountain ram, with the best hill ewes and all other sheep are mated with Aberfield rams (Texel-cross-Blue Leicester).

"I reseeded three acres with Tyfon and grass in late May and have grazed two batches of 25 lambs on the crop so far," says David.

"Each batch grazed the Tyfon for one month, with a fortnight of a regrowth period in between the two batches. The lambs had an average daily gain of 280g while on the Tyfon, with 15 lambs from both batches sold to the factory at the end of each grazing period, which lasted about 30 days."



"I will continue on with a similar system of grazing and the third batch of 20 lambs is currently grazing the crop."

"The aim is to have over 60 lambs sold to the factory off the crop by

Main points on Tyfon

- Time the sowing date to coincide with weaning, the crop needs 60 days to get ready.
- Match stocking rate to amount sown to ensure you can finish a group without running out of Tyfon or letting it get overgrown.
- Lambs need to be a minimum of 34kg going into the crop: smaller lambs do not thrive as well and the heavier lambs will finish on it.
- All lambs need a good-quality mineral drench/bolus with a special focus on a product high in iodine.
- A post-emergence spray can't be used on the reseed to control weeds, as this will kill the Tyfon. However, the reseed can be sprayed the following spring when the Tyfon has been grazed out and is no longer present in the sward.
- Tyfon can deliver weight gains of up to 300g/day for finishing lambs at a time of the year when thrive off grass alone is reduced to around 150g/day. Good grazing management is critical to achieve these gains.
- Brassicas should form no more than 70% of the diet – with 30% coming from a fibre source such as silage, straw, hay or a runback on to permanent pasture.
- There are a number of companies supplying Tyfon in Ireland.

Christmas. On the final grazing, the bulb at the bottom of the plant will be eaten as well as the leaves. Tyfon will not recover once the bulb is eaten and so the sward will return to grass and clover."

David is a firm believer that soil fertility is extremely important when growing Tyfon. He has found that having P and K at index 3, as well as having the pH between 6.2 and 6.5, is vital to ensure that the crop will establish and grow to its potential.

He has also found that lambs need to have good size before attempting to fatten them on Tyfon.

"Some of the smaller hill lambs did not achieve the same level of thrive as the larger-framed lambs, simply because they were not well enough grown," says David.

"In future, I will allow these lambs more time to develop a larger frame before introducing them on to the Tyfon."