



Martin Murphy with Teagasc advisor Damian Costello.

FARM FOCUS

Sheep farmer Martin Murphy from Co Galway outlines the management plan for his flock during the critical final eight weeks of pregnancy

Damian Costello
Teagasc advisor, Athenry

Martin and Christina Murphy from Ballyglass, Turloughmore, Co Galway, run a March lambing ewe flock on their fragmented holding. This is a sheep-only farm with the outfarm located over 10 miles from the home farm. Their son Thomas is also actively involved in the day-to-day running of the farm and is currently completing his formal agricultural training at Teagasc, Athenry. I asked Martin to outline their management plan for the flock during the critical last eight weeks of pregnancy.

• **Housing:** “The 170 ewe flock are due to start lambing in mid-March,” says Martin. “The lambing date has been pushed back slightly in recent years to coincide with grass growth in the area. We are preparing the winter housing as the ewes will be scanned and housed in mid-January. The

winter housing is straw-bedded and ewes are fed hay or haylage supplemented with concentrates.”

• **Scanning:** When scanning is completed, ewes will be penned in groups as per litter size. The single-bearing ewes remain outdoors until nearer lambing and will only be supplemented with concentrates for the last four weeks pre-lambing. Concentrate feeding of twin- and triplet-bearing ewes commences immediately after scanning.

“Final preparation for lambing on the Murphy farm includes stocking up on the essential supplies

• **Concentrate feeding:** A compound nut is purchased from a local supplier. “I look for a 19% protein ewe and lamb nut with soya bean as the main

protein source,” says Martin. This will be introduced to the triplet- and twin-bearing ewes immediately after scanning. Twins start at 0.25kg/head/day and are stepped up gradually to about 1kg/head/day in the weeks before lambing,” explains Martin. “Triplets get a little bit more – starting at 0.3kg rising to 1.2kg pre-lambing.”

• **Flock health:** Ewes have already been treated twice for liver fluke outdoors and will receive a further treatment four weeks after housing. Martin says that given the very wet second half of 2017, he is not taking any chances with liver fluke. “Ewes will also receive their annual booster shot against clostridial diseases at the beginning of February.”

• **Lambing:** Final preparation for lambing on the Murphy farm includes stocking up on the essential supplies and having lots of individual pens ready well in advance of the first arrival. “You have to prepare carefully even for the most simple and obvious things,” concludes Martin.