

SHEEP

September 2020

Grassland management

Edited by
Ciaran Lynch,
Sheep Specialist

It is important to take stock of grass supply on the farm at this stage of the year to start planning for autumn management. Take account of the number of lambs remaining on the farm and when they are likely to finish and factor this into the autumn management plan. Grass growth rates have been particularly strong during August, resulting in many farms building covers. Farms should aim to have 20 days' grazing ahead at the start of September, building



to 30 days ahead by the end of the month. The closing date for the application of chemical nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) is September 15. Better responses will be achieved from applications earlier in the month rather than closer to the deadline. Ensure swards receive some level of N application to improve grass growth into the autumn, particularly where higher stocking rates are being carried for the coming weeks.

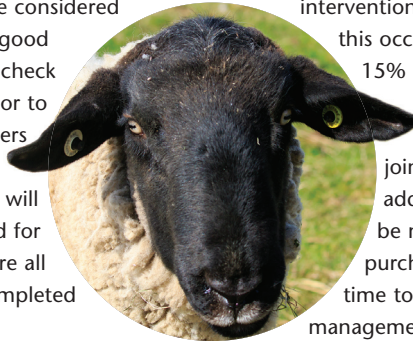
Drafting lambs

Take stock of the remaining lambs on the farm and how close they are to finish; this will influence the autumn grassland management. The wet conditions during August have had an impact on lamb performance, which in turn will delay finishing. It is important to maintain lamb performance at this stage of the year. Continue to allow lambs access to the best pasture, grazing down to approximately

6cm and cleaning out with ewes. Keep drafting lambs regularly; remember lamb kill-out percentages will decline as the season progresses. It is important to handle lambs when drafting to ensure adequate cover. Providing concentrate supplementation at a rate of 0.3-0.5kg per day to a finishing group (i.e., those near drafting weight) will help attain finish and compensate for any reduction in performance.

Getting ready for breeding

Monitor ewe condition during the coming weeks. In September, aim for a target ewe condition of 3.5 at joining. Identify and draft thinner ewes onto better grazing, e.g., join up with finishing female lambs for the coming weeks. Those that fail to improve condition prior to joining should be considered for culling. This is also a good time to do a final health check on the breeding flock prior to joining. Re-checking udders and mouths, as well as culling repeat lame ewes will help reduce the workload for the coming season. Ensure all health treatments are completed in the coming weeks.



Rams on the farm need to be monitored over the coming weeks. There is always a risk of a ram becoming infertile. Any infection that causes an elevation in the ram's body temperature to 104°F (40°C) will likely result in infertility for a period of six to seven weeks. Regular inspection of rams and prompt intervention is a must to reduce the risk of this occurring. As rams will lose up to 15% of their bodyweight during mating, it is essential they are in good condition prior to joining. In certain cases, additional supplementation may be needed to achieve this. With purchased ram lambs, allow them time to acclimatise to the change in management system.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Get winter ready

From mid September onwards is the ideal time to focus on getting winter ready. In recent years, storms, flooding, snow and ice have become more frequent in winter. Now is the time to do winter-ready maintenance around the farm. For example, check for buildings or trees that could collapse. Check your supplies, e.g., anti-slip grit, protective clothing and equipment, torch batteries and first-aid boxes. Make sure to have your emergency contacts up to date and accessible and that your Eircode is displayed in a prominent place. Further



Be winter ready.



information on getting winter ready is available on the health and safety section of the Teagasc website.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Strong grass growth brings its own challenges

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how strong grass growth has affected the BETTER sheep farms.



Grass growth was very strong during July and August.

Grass growth rates have been exceeding demand for the lowland flocks throughout the end of July and into August. For the lower-stocked farms, this presented a greater challenge to manage compared to the farms at their targeted stocking rate. But the strong grass growth rates have meant that silage supplies across the farms are good after a slow start for some, due to the dry conditions earlier in the year. Lamb drafting is continuing on the farms, with some supplementing heavier ram lambs at grass.

Table 1: Lamb performance from three of the Teagasc BETTER hill sheep flocks from birth to 14 weeks (weaning).

Birth type	Growth rate (g/day)		14-week weight (kg)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	250	(202-323)	26	(24.9-27.3)
2	172	(154-185)	21	(19.0-22.1)

The end of July/early August also saw a sharp increase in faecal worm counts in some of the flocks and lambs have been dosed accordingly, but the sharp increase highlighted the importance of carrying out faecal egg counts to assess worm burdens in lambs.

The hill flock lambs were weaned during August and a summary of the weights is presented in **Table 1** from three of the flocks. Overall, the performance of lambs was along expected lines, with the farmers happy with how lambs had done since the seven-week weights. A breakdown of the lamb weights by weight category (e.g., how many are over 30kg, how many are less than 25kg) will be used in conjunction with available grass supplies on the farms and current store lamb prices to make a decision as to how many, if any, lambs will be finished on farm and how many sold as stores.

RESEARCH UPDATE



Ensuring good autumn grass growth

PHILIP CREIGHTON, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, Athenry.

Lamb growth rates for the past month have been in the region of 140g/day (grass only) to 160g/day (grass and white clover), with 26% of lambs drafted from grass-only groups and 32% from grass and white clover groups up to mid August. Average liveweight for lambs drafted to date was 43.8kg, with average carcass weight 19.7kg. This represents an average kill-out percentage of 45%. While grass growth rates have been good, averaging 75kg DM/ha/day for July and August, grass dry matter content has reduced greatly in the last few weeks, which is impacting on lamb performance. Rainfall levels in Athenry for July were over 200% of normal levels at 174mm. To date, 85% of the total nitrogen (N) allowance for both the high (145kg N/ha) and low (90kg N/ha) N treatments has been spread. The final round of N was applied in late August to ensure adequate grass growth



Nitrogen application will encourage good autumn grass growth.

for the autumn. To date, the grass-only treatments have grown on average 8.0 tonnes DM/ha, the grass and white clover area at the high N rate has grown 8.45 tonnes DM/ha, and the grass and white clover area at the low N rate has grown 7.65 tonnes DM/ha. All treatments have met their silage requirements for the winter.

Virtual Sheep Week

In the absence of a Sheep Open Day this year, Teagasc is hosting a Virtual Sheep Week from September 21-25. This will provide daily updates showcasing ongoing work in the areas of grassland, genetic improvement, flock health, hill sheep, as

well as information on environmental and policy issues. Each evening from 7.00pm-8.00pm, there will be a live webinar focusing on the topic of the day. Further details will be available closer to the event from the various media outlets and the Teagasc website. This Virtual Sheep Week is highly relevant to all sheep producers.