

# SHEEP

January 2021

## Grassland management

Edited by  
**Michael Gottstein,**  
Head of Sheep  
Knowledge Transfer

Don't be tempted to re-graze fields that have been closed for the spring time. Grass will be a lot more valuable to the ewes next March/April than it is now. January is an ideal time for taking some soil samples to assess soil fertility if this has not been done in the last four or five years. Order your spring fertiliser to have it in the yard so that you can spread it when weather and ground conditions improve in February. Use

protected urea where possible.

### Lime

Lime is great value in terms of improving grass growth and the efficiency with which the chemical fertiliser applied is utilised by the grass plant. Applying chemical fertiliser to land that is sub-optimal in terms of pH is inefficient, wasteful and damaging to the environment.

## Sheep census

The date for the annual sheep census was December 31. Completed forms must be returned by Monday February 1. Flock owners who opt to submit their annual sheep census return online can avail of an extended closing date of Monday February 15. It is important that all flock owners return the sheep census on time as failure to do so can have consequences for other schemes such as Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) and the Sheep Welfare Scheme.

## Stomach worms

This year as part of the pack containing the sheep census you will also have got a document *Control of Stomach Worms – improving sustainability*. This is a useful document in helping you to reduce the speed at which the wormers on your farm break down and stop working. There are four simple steps that if followed should greatly improve the length of time that anthelmintics remain effective on your farm.



## Liver fluke

Reports from veterinary laboratories and factories indicate that there is a lot of liver fluke around this winter. It is not surprising really given the wet weather in the back end of 2020. For sheep that are out wintered or that have been recently housed, using a product that is effective against immature

fluke is important. Sheep that have been housed for ten weeks or more can be treated with products that are effective against adult fluke only. Don't use combination fluke and worm drenches unless there is a need for a worm treatment also. Adult ewes do not need to be treated for stomach worms unless there is a demonstrated need.

## Upcoming events

### 2021 Virtual Sheep Conference

Conducted by webinars on two nights.

#### Tuesday, January 26

- ▶ Nicola Fetherstone, Teagasc, INZAC study, on comparing Irish and New Zealand genetics; and,
- ▶ Dr Paul Kenyon, on New Zealand guidelines for growing lambs to target live weights on herbage.

#### Thursday, January 28

- ▶ Dr Áine O'Brien, Teagasc, on mothering ability and viability; and,
- ▶ Ben Strugnell, independent veterinary consultant from the UK on laryngeal chondritis, known as "Texel Throat".

Both webinars start at 8.00pm and will run for 40 minutes plus 20 minutes for audience questions. Details on how to view these virtual events will be advertised on our website [www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie) closer to the event.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

# Health is wealth



Put health at the top of your agenda for 2021. A major Irish study completed in 2020 found that 74% of farmers have four or more risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD), which increases the chance of having a stroke or heart attack threefold compared to those with



*Improve your health by selecting achievable goals.*

fewer risk factors. January is the month for new year resolutions but the challenge is to implement them over time. Select achievable goals and check in with yourself at regular intervals to see how you are doing. Better still work with a friend or family member to monitor goal achievement. The booklet 'Fit for Farming' on the web gives health goal pointers. Small changes over time can have a major impact on one's health. The Irish health study is available at [www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/farmers-have-hearts-cardiovascular-health-programme.php](http://www.teagasc.ie/publications/2020/farmers-have-hearts-cardiovascular-health-programme.php)

## BETTER FARM UPDATE

## DMD up slightly in 2020

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre at Teagasc Athenry reports from the BETTER Farm there on ewe management and silage analysis.

Nearly all the ewes from the mid-season flocks will be housed during December/early January. Ewes that have been housed will remain on an all silage diet until six-to-eight weeks pre lambing before concentrates are introduced. The timing of introducing concentrates will depend on lambing date, scanned litter size and the quality of the available silage. Pregnancy scanning will take place on the lowland flocks during late December/January and, following scanning, ewes will be divided by litter size and raddle colours (lambing date) so that winter feeding plans can be put into action for the various groups. The hill flocks are finished mating at this stage and ewes are gone back to the hill until scanning in February.

Results from silage analysis from the farms is being completed at time of writing and the



results to date are summarised in **Table 1**. While still only initial analysis, as more results are due in, dry matter percentage appears to be ahead of last year by about 3%, possibly as a result of some silage being made in very dry conditions in the early summer last year. However, aside from this, the figures are relatively similar to 2019 with most flocks having some silage that is 70% dry matter digestibility (DMD) plus available for late pregnancy feeding. The forage analysis will be a key part of developing the feeding plan for the flocks in the run up to lambing. Different batches of silage bales were marked during the summer so the best quality silage could be identified for feeding in the final six-to-eight weeks pre-lambing.

**Table 1: Results to date from silage quality tests on baled silage on the BETTER sheep farms.**

2020	Mean	Min	Max	2019 Mean	Diff
DM (%)	38.5	21.4	61.9	35.8	2.7
PH	4.6	3.9	4.9	4.5	0.1
NH <sub>3</sub>	4.3	1.2	8.6	5.1	-0.7
Protein (% DM)	13.0	10.4	15.6	12.4	0.6
ME (Mj/kg DM)	10.1	9.3	11	10.0	0.1
DMD (% DM)	70.3	65	75.8	70.1	0.2

## RESEARCH UPDATE

# Grass and grass clover compared



PHILIP CREIGHTON reports from the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm at the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry.

Our lamb-drafting pattern for autumn 2020 is outlined in

**Table 2.** We had to introduce concentrate supplementation in early October due to low grass dry matter (DM) content and declining lamb average daily gain (ADG). Any lambs remaining on the farm in late October were housed to conserve grass for ewes. They were built up to *ad lib* concentrates and had access to good quality silage. Preliminary analysis shows an average time to slaughter of 199 days for the grass-only treatments and 187 days for the grass clover treatments in 2020.



There was no difference in average carcass weight (20.3kg) or kill out percentage (46%).

Average clover content of the grass clover swards improved this year averaging 19% compared to 14% the last two years. Sward DM production for 2020 shows the grass-only (145kg N/ha) treatments grew 11.4 tons DM/ha, the grass clover (145kg N/ha) grew 11.9 tons DM/ha and the grass clover (90kg N/ha) grew 11.0 tons DM/ha. The majority of ewes have now been housed (mid-December). Weather conditions meant that utilising grass was challenging over the last few weeks.

**Table 2: Lamb drafting pattern autumn 2020.**

% lambs drafted	end Sept	end Oct*	end Nov	mid Dec
Grass only	57	78	91	97
Grass clover	67	85	93	99

\* Remaining lambs housed