

SHEEP

January 2022

Fertiliser

Fertiliser prices have increased dramatically since last spring. Your 2021 fertiliser budget will probably only purchase between 40% and 50% of the tonnage for the coming year. Do a budget, look at your 2021 spend and see how much you are willing to spend in 2022. Merchant credit may also be an issue for 2022, so talk to your lending institutions (banks, credit unions, etc.) if this will be an issue for you. Once you have decided how much money you are going to apportion to fertiliser purchases in 2022, you will need to decide how you are going to allocate this

Lime

Check soil sample results. Spread any lime required as soon as possible. Spreading lime will improve grass growth in the coming year by releasing nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) that has been locked up in the soil. This 'free' fertiliser will help to reduce the need to purchase expensive chemical fertiliser.

fertiliser. Target higher allocations to areas that will give you the best response (high-fertility fields, silage ground, recent reseeds, etc.). Your advisor can help you to develop a plan to make best use of fertiliser available.

Grass

Strong autumn grass growth has left significant covers on fields that were closed in October. Don't be tempted to graze these off again. Keep this grass for ewes after lambing time.

Sheep Census

Don't forget to complete and submit your annual Sheep Census return. The date of the annual census is December 31. A lot of money hinges on this form being completed and submitted on time. Deadline for postal returns is January 31. Flock owners opting to return their census online have until February 14 to do so.

Concentrate feed

The National Farm Survey shows a dramatic increase in concentrate usage on sheep farms. Concentrate feed costs are estimated to have risen by 40% in 2021 as a result of an increase in concentrate feed prices and a 20% increase in concentrate usage. As concentrate prices continue to rise, it is important that steps are taken to reduce any unnecessary concentrate

usage. Simply separating single-bearing from twin-bearing ewes and later-lambing ewes from earlier-lambing ewes can significantly reduce the amount of concentrates used. Feeding later-lambing ewes for an extra ten days (by not separating them from earlier-lambing ewes) can cost between €2.50 and €4 per ewe.

HEALTH & SAFETY

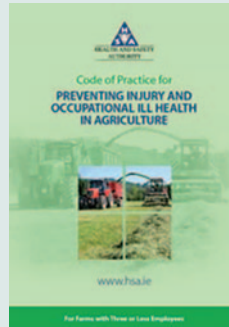
Prepare to cut risk

Research by Teagasc indicates that rushing and tiredness are major causal factors of farm workplace injuries, so good preparation is essential to cut risks.

The coming weeks provide an opportunity for farm maintenance and making health and safety improvements before the busy spring season. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has extended the Targeted Agriculture Modernisation Scheme II (TAMSII) into 2022, so longer-term measures can be planned.

January is an ideal time to update your farm's risk assessment document. It is a legal requirement to complete a risk assessment at least annually.

This document will provide guidance to you to identify and remedy the full range of farm hazards and risks. Most importantly, where



Complete your risk assessment document.

hazards and risks are identified – take action. Finally, health is wealth and farmers have been found to have a lower health status than other occupational groups. The early part of the year is a great time to get a health check done and to consider taking on health-enhancing measures, e.g., diet, aerobic exercise.



RESEARCH UPDATE



Sheep Research Demonstration Farm

PHILIP CREIGHTON of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on mating and drafting.

Rams were removed from ewes in mid November following a five-week mating period. There were very few repeats observed, so hopefully we will have a good scan in January.

The majority of 2021 lambs have now been drafted, as shown in **Table 1**. We had to introduce concentrate supplementation at a rate of 500g/head/day in early October, due to low grass DM percentage and declining lamb average daily gain (ADG). Any lambs remaining on the farm in late October were housed to conserve grass for ewes. These

lambs were built up to *ad-lib* concentrates with access to high-quality baled silage. All ewes in the high stocking rate groups are now housed for the winter (mid December) but the lower stocking rate groups should remain at grass until after Christmas depending on weather conditions. Sward DM production for 2021 shows the grass-only (145kg N/ha) treatments grew 12.5 tonnes DM/ha, the grass-clover (145kg N/ha) grew 12.7 tonnes DM/ha, and the grass-clover (90kg N/ha) grew 12.0 tonnes DM/ha.

Table 1: Lamb drafting pattern autumn 2021.

	Percentage of lambs drafted at end of October*	Percentage of lambs drafted at end of November	Percentage of lambs drafted at end of December
Grass only	73	88	98.5
Grass clover	83	94	99
11 ewes/ha	88	94	99
13 ewes/ha	80	90	98

*Remaining lambs housed.

Forage testing

If not already done, get your winter forage tested as soon as possible. Allocate the best-quality forage to ewes in the last six weeks of pregnancy. Ensure that late pregnancy concentrate supplementation takes into account the feed value of the forage, so as to avoid under/over feeding ewes.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Feeding plans

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenny, Co. Galway reports on winter feeding plans on the BETTER sheep farms.

A vital part of a winter feeding plan is to know the quality of what you're feeding and the BETTER farmers are currently getting the analysis of their silage samples back. The results received to date are summarised in **Table 2**, with DMD largely in line with last year for the flocks. The best-quality silage will be used closest to lambing when it will have the biggest benefit, as higher-quality silage allows for lower levels of concentrates to be offered to ewes in the lead up to lambing.

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). As concentrate prices have increased significantly on last year, this year more than ever attention

will be paid to delaying the onset of meal feeding to later-lambing ewes. Empty ewes in the flocks will also be sold after scanning. With the start of a new year, it is very important to reflect on last year from both the physical and financial performance perspective of the farm. All the BETTER sheep farmers will be completing an eProfit Monitor in January, which will be used to review the performance of their farms for 2021 and also to inform decisions for 2022. The farmers will also be completing a budget to see what they can afford to spend on inputs and how best to allocate this money in order to get the maximum benefit. This year more than ever, this will be vital as the cost of some inputs have increased significantly and costs will need to be carefully managed.

Table 2: Results to date from silage quality tests on baled silage on the BETTER sheep farms.

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
DM (%)	38.0	19.3	46.6
PH	4.6	4.1	5
NH ₃	4.7	2.7	21.6
Protein (% DM)	12.8	10.7	15.3
ME (Mj/kg DM)	9.9	8.9	10.7
DMD (% DM)	69.2	62.5	74.2

Upcoming events

The Teagasc National Sheep Conference (online) takes place on Tuesday, January 25 and Thursday, January 27. Both events commence at 8.00pm. Further details and how to register for this event can be found on: www.teagasc.ie.