

SHEEP

February 2021

Grassland management

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Closing date, along with early fertiliser and/or slurry application, are the two main factors that determine the availability of grass for your ewes and lambs at turnout. The target is to let out ewes and lambs to 6cm covers of high-quality grass. From both an environmental and economic viewpoint, significant drying out of ground is required before slurry or early nitrogen (N) applications can be considered in many situations. As well as having suitable ground conditions, applications should be delayed until soil temperature is above the 6°C required for growth. Also keep a close eye on the weather

forecast and avoid spreading before a severe drop in temperature or if heavy rain is expected. Slurry applications at a rate of 1,500-2,000 gallons per acre should be targeted at driest fields with low grass covers. The best response to early chemical N applications will be on swards with a high proportion of perennial ryegrass and where they have been closed up for 120 days allowing good covers of grass to build up. Remember, the response to applied fertiliser is not immediate, so apply half a bag per acre of protected urea (46% N) once conditions are suitable.

Feeding management of ewes in late pregnancy

The reward for getting pre-lambing nutrition of the ewe right is producing vigorous lambs of optimum birth weight and having ewes lambing down with a plentiful milk supply. This is generally achieved by supplementing your forage pre lambing with a

high-quality concentrate feed. The nut or ration should contain high-quality ingredients and 19/20% crude protein with soya bean as the main protein source. Develop a feeding plan based on the quality of forage available and feed concentrates based on scanned litter size and expected lambing date. Keep an eye on body condition as thinner ewes will need extra feeding. In practical terms, this can be done by moving

thinner twin-bearing ewes, for example, up to a similar feed level as the triplet-bearing ewes. Good feeding management is critical and some tips include:

- ensure adequate concentrate feed space (600mm per large-framed ewe);
- keep a constant supply of forage available and remove refused/stale material regularly;
- clean out drinkers weekly to ensure fresh water

is in constant supply;

- introduce concentrate supplementation in time and step up gradually;
- split concentrates into two feeds at least eight hours apart once feeding over 0.5kg/head/day;
- treat incidences of lameness promptly as lame ewes are less likely to compete for feed; and,
- keep an eye out for shy feeders and separate out to encourage them to eat meal.

Upcoming event

2021 Virtual Hill Sheep Conference

Live one-hour webinars on two consecutive evenings

Wednesday and Thursday, February 17 and 18

Webinars start at 8.00pm each evening and both will include two 20-minute presentations and allow 20 minutes for audience questions. Details on how to view these virtual events will be advertised through Teagasc social media channels and on our website www.teagasc.ie closer to the event.

HEALTH & SAFETY

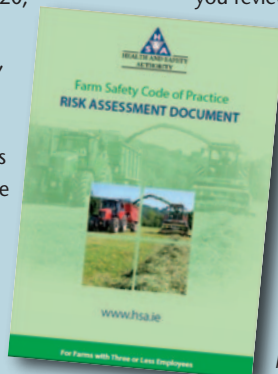
Review your risk assessment

February brings an increase in workload and associated risk to the farm. In 2020, 19 farm workplace deaths occurred, three in the childhood, six in the 17-64 years, and 10 in the 65 year old or higher age categories. Each of these fatalities is a huge tragedy. Let us all in the farming sector aim for zero accidents and make every possible effort to prevent deaths and serious injuries in 2021. This involves being alert to possible

dangers and taking preventative action. Have you reviewed your risk assessment document for

2021? It is a legal duty to do this at least annually. Farmers tend to mainly use the farm vehicle, machinery and buildings pages. To do a comprehensive risk assessment review, go through the complete document, particularly the children and older farmers risk assessment section. Most importantly, follow-up with actions.

Implement your risk assessment.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Pregnancy rates similar to last year

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway explains how the BETTER sheep farms have started off the new year.

As presented in **Table 1**, the lowland farms pregnancy scanned their ewes in late December/January. Overall, scanned litter size was very similar to last year, with a small increase of 0.04 on the average scanned litter size for the group as a whole. While one flock recorded an increase of 0.24 in scanned litter size, litter sizes are on target for most of the flocks, with lower-scanning flocks showing an upward trend. Pregnancy rates were very similar to last year for the group as a whole and while somewhat variable, they are still broadly in line with targets. Some of the farms have scanned yearling ewes, with some still to scan them in the coming days. The farms have also re-assessed what fodder supplies remain to ensure fodder budgets are on target or to take remedial action if necessary to deal with any potential shortfalls.



The BETTER farms are keeping a close eye on fodder supplies.

Likewise, the hill farms will be pregnancy scanning this month. This time will also provide a good opportunity to assess how these ewes are doing on the hill over the winter and assess ewe body condition score (BCS) in case any very thin ewes need preferential treatment after scanning.

Table 1: Mature ewe scanning results from lowland BETTER farms 2020/21.

Farm	Boyle	Carey	Dunne	Gonley	Kearney	Moore	O'Connell	O'Leary	O'Toole	Powell
Location	Donegal	Mayo	Wicklow	Sligo	Louth	Roscommon	Leitrim	Kerry	Galway	Tipperary
Scanned litter size	1.73	1.88	1.98	2.03	1.96	2.03	2.07	2.15	2.05	1.74
Scanned pregnancy rate (%)	98.5	93.0	95.8	96.0	94.6	93.2	95.8	98.1	94.0	93.9
Scanning rate	1.71	1.75	1.90	1.95	1.85	1.89	1.98	2.11	1.93	1.63

RESEARCH UPDATE



Lambing season is fast approaching

EDEL O'CONNOR, AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how the INZAC Flock Athenry is preparing for lambing.

All INZAC ewes were pregnancy scanned in early January to assist pre-lambing management decisions. Preliminary results show an overall pregnancy rate to first service of 76% and scan rates of 1.60 lambs per ewe joined to the ram for Irish low-genetic merit ewes, 1.77 lambs per ewe joined for Irish high-genetic merit ewes and 1.80 lambs per ewe joined for New Zealand ewes. Immediately after scanning, all ewes were weighed and had BCS recorded before being penned according to scanned litter size and lambing date. Overall, ewes are averaging 79kg liveweight, however more importantly; BCS was good with an average BCS of 3.7 for all ewes. Since housing in early December, the ewes have been offered grass silage (78DMD) *ad-lib*. Concentrate supplementation, with a 20% protein nut as shown in **Table 2**, began at eight, six and four weeks pre-lambing for triplet-, twin- and single-bearing ewes, respectively. The pre-lambing clostridia booster was administered at the end of January, ahead of a lambing start date of March 3. As you are

reading this, we are approximately three weeks away from lambing. This time is used to prepare for the busy period ahead and ensure that all necessary supplies are in place on the farm, with checklists being created for equipment and medicines required. We carry out a significant amount of data recording at lambing, therefore, it is reassuring for everyone involved to refresh themselves on the traits we are recording, how it is carried out and the equipment used.

In recent weeks, we have carried out measurements on methane production and individual feed intake on some of the INZAC ewe lambs on a grass silage diet. Portable accumulation chambers (PACs) are used to measure methane production from sheep, where sheep are placed in the PAC for 50 minutes. Preliminary results from the study show that ewe lambs averaging 54kg produced on average 11g of methane per day, with a dry matter intake of 0.83kg DM per day.

Table 2: Concentrate supplementation for pre-lambing ewes.

	Weeks pre lambing				Total
	8-7	6-5	4-3	2-1	
	Concentrates (kg/ewe/day)				
Singles	-	-	0.3	0.5	11.2
Twins	-	0.30	0.55	0.85	23.8
Triplets	0.30	0.55	0.75	0.95	35.7