

September 2021

# SHEEP

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## Grassland

As our efforts shift towards setting up the closing plan for the farm and building up a reserve of grass, we still need to focus on achieving high levels of lamb performance and building ewe condition prior to the mating period. It's important we keep a check on the demand on the farm and take steps early in the month to provide sufficient grass supply for the coming months as growth tapers off. As we move through September, the target pre-grazing cover increases slightly to 1,500-2,000kg DM/ha or 8-10cm.

Aim to graze these swards down to around 6cm with lambs and follow them in rotation with the main ewe group to graze these swards out to between 4cm and 4.5cm. Thinner ewes should be grazed alongside finishing or replacement ewe lambs. On this rotation, try to clean these fields out properly as this will make it easier to graze these fields out in the final rotations and improve the quality of grass

carried over winter and into early spring. It's also important to start grazing paddocks in the rotation you intend to close them in October and November.

Aim to have 30 days' grass ahead of the flock by late September. Target areas that haven't received fertiliser nitrogen (N) with a final application before the September 15 deadline to maintain autumn growth. Remember, response rates will decline as the month progresses, and ideally in coming seasons, aim to have more of this spread in late August. Areas where soil fertility issues need to be addressed or where surplus was removed for silage should be targeted with a suitable compound fertiliser to replenish phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) offtakes. Spreading remaining slurry or farmyard manure (FYM) on these areas is another option to replace offtakes and build soil fertility – just ensure good graze outs prior to slurry or FYM application.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

## On the hill

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the hill flocks and two new farms joining the programme.

The hill farms weaned their lambs during August and a summary of the weights is presented in **Table 1** from four of the flocks.

Lamb performance has generally been good across the hill flocks and the farms are assessing their options for selling these lambs based on local store lamb prices and the grass and facilities available for finishing lambs on farm. As we move into the autumn and early winter, available grass supplies on enclosed/green ground on these farms will be prioritised for the ewe flock for mating, with only additional grass potentially available to lambs.

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

Birth type	Growth rate birth to 14 weeks (g/day)		14-week weight (kg)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	225	202-243	27.0	24.6-30.9
2	175	154-189	22.6	18.8-27.9

### New flocks

We are pleased to announce that two new farms are joining the Teagasc BETTER farm sheep programme this year. They are:

- Eddie Gavin, who runs both a lowland sheep flock alongside beef and tillage enterprises near Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow; and,

- Brian Keane, who also runs a lowland sheep flock alongside beef and tillage enterprises near Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford.

Farm plans for both flocks are currently being discussed as the breeding season approaches and full inventories of all sheep are being collected as the farms begin performance recording in their flocks.

## Getting ready for breeding

As the clock ticks down to the start of the breeding season for many flocks, so does the time to correct any issues in the breeding flocks. Lowland flocks should aim to have their ewe flocks in condition score of 3.5, with as few as possible below this target. Building condition will take time as one unit is equivalent to 10-

12kg in body weight for most of our lowland ewe breeds. As indicated, earlier thinner ewes should be grazed separately to the main ewe group. Those that fail to respond to better grazing should be examined closely and considered for culling as there may be underlying health issues. Ensure ewes are rechecked before ram turnout. Look at mouths, udders, and for lame ewes. This is an opportunity to remove any problem ewes out of

## HEALTH &amp; SAFETY



## Food for thought

The Teagasc strategy applies the total worker health model to support farmers with both health and wellbeing and health and safety. Excess body weight is associated with increased injury, cardiovascular disease, cancers, Covid-19 disease severity, musculoskeletal disorders and depression. An Irish study involving Teagasc found that 62% of male farmer study participants were overweight or obese. A high proportion of diets had a low intake of fruits and vegetables, dairy products and fish, and a high intake of meat, fried foods, salt, and sugary and/or salty snacks. Further information on healthy eating is available from the HSE online guide 'How to Eat Well'. Also, Teagasc is holding half-day health and safety courses in all regions. They are a great way to update your knowledge



*Fruit and veg for health.*

and motivation on farm health and safety. The course is a requirement for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme 2 (TAMS II) submission grant claim. The current closing date for TAMS II applications is November 5, 2021. Contact your advisor if you want support in making an application.



## OviCast

The Teagasc Sheep podcast *OviCast* has regular updates covering technical aspects on grassland, breeding, nutrition and health, as well as industry-focused episodes. Scan the QR code and start listening.



the flock and reduce the workload for the coming season. With strong cull ewe prices, it needs to be considered. Inspect rams regularly in the lead-up to mating. Close attention needs to be paid to their physical soundness in the lead-up to joining. It's important any new rams that are needed are purchased early, as ram lambs will need time to acclimatise to the change in management system. Deal with any health issues, particularly

signs of lameness, promptly. The risk of ram infertility is always a concern. 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. Rams will also lose up to 15% of their body weight during mating; therefore, they need to be in good condition prior to joining. In certain cases, additional supplementation may be needed to achieve this.

## RESEARCH UPDATE



# Lamb growth and drafting



*Average ewe BCS has been maintained at 3.0 since weaning.*

**PHILIP CREIGHTON** of AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lamb growth rates on the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, Athenry.

Lamb growth rates for the past month have been in the region of 164g/day (grass only) to 187g/day (grass and white clover), with 25% of lambs drafted from grass-only groups and 30% drafted from grass and white clover groups up to mid August. On a stocking rate basis, 33% of lambs have been drafted from the 11 ewes/ha groups and 21% from the 13 ewes/ha groups. Average ewe body condition score (BCS) has been maintained at 3.0 since weaning. Replacement rates for the flocks this year are averaging 22%, with little difference

evident between groups. We will go through ewes again before mating. Faecal egg counts continue to be monitored in lambs. We did see a sharp rise in egg counts once rain arrived following the dry spell. To date the grass-only treatments have grown on average 8.0t DM/ha, and the grass and white clover treatments have grown 8.3t DM/ha. All treatments have met their silage requirement for the winter. To date 85% of the total N allowance for the high (145kg N/ha), and 90% of the allowance for the low (90kg N/ha), N treatments has been spread. The final round of N will be applied in early September to ensure adequate grass growth for the autumn.