

Sheep

A Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

January 2012

Sheep Census 2011

Have you completed and submitted your sheep Census for 2011? Apart from there being a legal onus on you to fill this form (if you have sheep), this is also essential to enable you to make a claim under the sheep grassland scheme (~€9/ewe). In 2010 45% of breaches relating to sheep inspections under cross compliance related to incorrect / failure to complete the sheep census adequately.

The form is very easy to complete. It requires the total number of ewes over 12mth of age. The total number of breeding rams and the total number of other sheep. The final box is the sum total of all the sheep on the holding – i.e. the first three numbers added together. The census relates to the number of sheep on the holding between the 9th and 13th of December. This means that replacement ewes lambs born in 2011 do not count as ewes and should be put in the box relating to the total number of other sheep on the holding.

Completed forms must be returned by Monday 9th January – if you have any queries regarding the form there is a helpline that you can ring 1890-252-713

Scanning

January is the peak time for scanning March lambing flocks. Scanning is an essential tool in managing your ewe flock pre-lambing. Aim to scan the ewes 80 days after ram turnout, but in order for all pregnant sheep to be

identifiable the rams must have been removed at least 30 days prior to scanning.

The benefit of scanning ewes is to be able to identify those that are carrying twins and triplets. Triplet bearing ewes will need supplementary feed much earlier than twin or single bearing ewes. So identifying these 10 weeks out from lambing is critical if their dietary requirements are to be met. With moderate quality grass silage (66%DMD) Triplet bearing ewes should start receiving 0.2kg concentrates 10 weeks out from lambing. With good quality silage meal feeding can be delayed by two weeks.

Profit Monitor

January is the most appropriate time to complete a profit monitor analysis for your farm. 2011 was a good year for sheep producers – but it is important to note that while output prices rose significantly so too did many input prices. Completing a profit monitor analysis allows for critical analysis of all aspects of the enterprise not just financial but also items such as output, litter size and stocking rate. A profit monitor analysis is an essential tool in identifying where efficiencies, savings and increased outputs can be achieved in the coming year.

Contact your local Teagasc Office for more information on how to complete a profit monitor analysis for your farm. It is a free service for existing Teagasc clients.



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Concentrate protein source impacts on animal performance - Dr Tim Keady

A recent study was undertaken at Athenry to evaluate the effect of source of concentrate protein, and concentrate feed level on the performance of ewes in late pregnancy and the performance of their progeny. In late pregnancy ewes were offered either low (16 and 21 kg for twins and triplet bearing ewes) or high (28 and 32 kg for twin and triplet bearing ewes) concentrate feed levels. Two concentrates were formulated using two different sources of protein namely soyabean meal and by-products. The main protein sources in the by product based concentrate were rapeseed meal, distillers grains and maize gluten feed. The concentrates were formulated to have the similar protein (18%) and metabolisable energy (12.4 mj/kg DM) concentrations. The ewes had been housed in early December, shorn and offered grass silage (DMD 74%) ad-lib until lambing.

The soyabean based concentrate increased lamb birth weight by 0.36 kg and lamb live weight gain from birth to 5 weeks by 22 g/

day. Subsequently, lambs from ewes offered the soyabean based concentrate were 0.8 kg heavier at weaning. Increasing concentrate feed level in late pregnancy had no effect on lamb birth weight or subsequent lamb performance. It is concluded that altering the protein source in the concentrate offered to ewes in late pregnancy, even when formulated to concentrate similar crude protein and metabolisable energy concentrations, had a greater effect on lamb performance than increasing concentrate feed level by 75% for twin bearing ewes. Therefore concentrate ingredient composition is more important than feed level.



Early Lamb - Easter is 16 days earlier this year so lambs destined for the Easter market must be available for slaughter around 2nd April

Early Lamb Production

Easter Sunday falls on the 8th April in 2012. That's over two weeks earlier than in 2011 so it will put producers under a bit more pressure to get lambs ready for this market. Lamb destined to hit the Easter trade will need to be available for slaughter by the 2nd April. To ensure that animal performance is maximised the following key points should be kept in mind;

- Ewes will need concentrate supplementation post lambing if roughage

quantity / quality is lacking. Feeding levels of 1kg -1.5kg /hd per day for the first 5 weeks post lambing will be required unless good grass/brassicas are available.

- Ewe milk yield peaks at around 3 - 4 weeks post lambing, after which it starts to drop
- Lambs should be introduced to creep from about 10 days of age – start them on a palatable lamb crunch, once they start eating significant quantities start mixing in cheaper lamb fattening rations.
- Once lambs start consuming 250grams meal per day stop feeding the ewes concentrates. (Usually five weeks of age)
- If grass/forage supplies are very tight ewes can be dried off and lambs finished on ad lib concentrate once the lambs are eating 250grams per head per day on three consecutive days.
- Tag a representative portion of the lambs (10 – 20 lambs) and weigh these at two weekly intervals to monitor lamb thrive.
- The main parasite affecting early lambs is coccidiosis – treat if required. Reducing access to wet/muddy areas by using adequate straw indoors or moving feeders regularly outdoors can greatly reduce the risk of the disease.

Freezing weather

For the last two winters we have had extremely cold weather. Be prepared, don't wait for feed bins to run low – remember the millers / merchants may not be able to deliver for a few days. Have a few bags of salt available to thaw out entrances to sheds etc. A 1000 litre water container and a few barrels cut in half are also useful should water supplies to the sheds freeze. Machinery etc also needs to be got winter ready if this has not already happened.



Sheep 2012

Saturday 30th June is the date that Sheep 2012 will take place at the Teagasc Research Farm, Mellows Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway. The event promises to be one of the biggest sheep events of 2012. It is envisaged that in addition to a commercial exhibits there will also be; sheep seminars, practical demonstrations, national championships of the major sheep breed societies, sheep dog trails, demonstration of sheep dog training, fencing demonstrations and lots more.

At this stage anyone that is interested in exhibiting at this event should contact 091-845200 or email: Sheep2012@teagasc.ie

Health and Safety Message.

'I am the lucky one' – that's the slogan for the current hard- hitting H.S.A. Farm Safety Campaign in the farming media. The campaign graphically depicts the consequences of a farm injury. January is a high risk month where 10% of the annual fatalities occur. The causes are being struck, crushed or entangled by farm vehicles or machines (34%), drowning or asphyxiation (19%), animal related (19%) along with tree felling and collapsing objects (12%) each and electrocution (3%). Almost 40% of victims were over 65 years of age. Give your health and safety first priority in 2012.

Research Updates

Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, Athenry – Dr. Philip Creighton

Rams were introduced to the flocks on the 10th of October and removed on the 25th of November giving a breeding season length of just under 7 weeks. The majority of ewes were bred during the first and the beginning of the second cycle. Ewes will be scanned in early January. Rams were housed after removal and are receiving 0.5kg/head/day of meal and ad lib silage.

Closing of paddocks commenced in late October and so there is a range of grass covers on the farm ranging between 650kg DM /ha (paddocks to be grazed first in spring) down to 50 kg DM / ha (paddocks closed last). The grazing season finished in early December with the high stocking rate group housed on the 1st of December followed by the medium and low stocking rate groups on the 5th of December due to weather/ground conditions. Ewes are housed in straw bedded sheds and are being offered baled silage (70 DMD) ad lib. They will receive a fluke dose in late December/early January.



Some of the ewes from the recently established Sheep Research Demonstration Farm

BETTER Farms - Ciaran Lynch AGRIC Athenry

Lowland flocks: All ewes are now housed and scanning is in the process of being completed on these farms. Yearlings that were joined in these flocks will be scanned 2 weeks after the main flock as these were joined later and were slower to mate. Following scanning ewes will be penned according to their scanned litter size and expected lambing date. The feeding regime for late pregnancy will be based on the scan results for the flock and their forage analysis.

Hill Flocks: All of the ewes are all on the hill and the rams are all removed. Replacement ewe lambs are all trained to eat meal. The first of the hill flocks will start to scan in late January with the rest completing scanning in early February.

Athenry Research Flock - Dr Tim Keady

The research flock at Athenry was housed in mid December. They were shorn within days of housing. Previous research from Athenry shows that shearing ewes at housing increases lamb birth weight by 0.6 kg and subsequent weaning weight by 1.9 kg. The ewes are currently being offered grass silage ad-libitum. The silage being offered is high feed value and has pH of 4.2, dry matter concentration of 19% and DMD of 79%, respectively. The flock will be scanned in early January.

For further information on any issues raised in this newsletter, or to access other enterprise newsletters, please contact your local Teagasc Advisor or see www.teagasc.ie.