

BETTER Farm Update

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With poor grazing conditions and poor grass utilisation the farmers began housing in early December with virtually stock housed prior to Christmas. A number of the farmers have been able to maintain a portion of the ewes or empty replacement ewe lambs outdoors on the drier areas or on winter root crops/brassicac. In many cases these are being supplemented as grazing conditions are very poor.

Once housed Ewes will be maintained on silage only diet up to scanning in late December /January. Those with ewe lambs that were joined will supplement these once housed with 250 to 300 g/day of concentrate. The average silage quality for he farms is summarised in Table 1. This has improved slightly on the 2014 crop – largely due to more fields being removed from the grazing rotation and conserved during the 2015 grazing season. The silage on the farms is predominantly round bale and like most farms there is range in silage quality present on the farms. The different qualities of silage present will be targeted at different classes of stock on the farms. Firstly, the best quality silage for the in lamb ewes and/or growing cattle where present on the farm. The poor quality silages first (i.e. less than 68% DMD) on the mixed farms cattle is fed to the spring calved cows. On the sheep only farms this silage is fed first when the ewes are still in mid pregnancy.

Table 1. Silage characteristics on BETTER farms for 2015season

	Mean	Range
DM (%)	29.0	(18.7 to 41.3)
PH	4.4	(3.9 to 4.7)
NH3 (% total N)	11.9	(7 to 15)
Protein (% DM)	12.1	(10.3 to 14.8)
ME (Mj/kg DM)	11	(9.9 to 11.8)
DMD (% DM)	70.9	(62 to 76)

The hill flocks finished up mating with a final round of sweeper rams used in early December. The effects of the weather varied on the 4 hill flocks in the programme. The majority of the ewes in these flocks went back to the hill in early to mid-December. However, a portion of the ewes in each of the flocks were remained down on the enclosed ground due

poor condition. This varied from 5 to 30% among the flocks. These flocks will be scanning in late January to early December.

E-Profit monitor

In January all of the farmers in the programme with their advisors will complete their E-profit monitor for 2013. By completing the profit monitors it provides a means to critically assess the performance of the farm business. For the new flocks it will allow us to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the systems and where improvement is needed. For the existing farms it provides an opportunity to scrutinize the impact of changes to the farming system have had on profitability.