

BETTER Farm update August 2022

Frank Champion

Animal & Grassland Research & Innovation Centre

As mentioned in the July update some of the flocks took the decision to wean lambs off the ewes a couple of weeks earlier than planned in order to reduce overall grass demand on the farm ensure the best grass was kept for the lambs. This turned out to be a good move for most of the flocks as weather conditions had restricted grass growth rates and it took a couple of weeks after the dry weather conditions for grass growth rates to return to normal.

The performance of lambs from birth to weaning and from the seven-week weights to weaning is presented in Table 1. Lamb performance was behind target for most up to seven weeks but has recovered somewhat from seven to 14 weeks. Lamb growth rates were from seven to 14 weeks were ahead of where they were last year meaning the average weaning weight for most of the flocks was on par with last year. There are a couple of potential reasons for this including what appears to be better quality grass swards during this period as there no significant explosion of grass growth lower stocked flocks found it easier to maintain grass quality in late May early June. Also typically during this period lambs would experience an internal parasite challenge from Stronglyes but the dry weather conditions kept this burden lower than normal which would have benefited lamb performance.

Currently grass growth rates on the farms are exceeding demand and the days ahead is starting to get high for some of the flocks. This will present a significant challenge in coming weeks to re-establish a good grazing rotation while also maintaining grass quality and lamb performance following the dry period and now a wet period of weather. It will be very important in the next few weeks lambs are not forced to graze heavy or poor quality covers so that lamb performance is maintained.

Table 1. Lamb performance from the Teagasc BETTER lowland sheep flocks from birth to 14 weeks (weaning).

Birth Type	ADG 7-14 Weeks (g/day)		ADG 0-14 Weeks (g/day)		14 Week Weight (kg)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	257	194-371	281	235-331	33.3	28.6-38.3
2	219	174-265	241	195-282	28.6	23.6-33.1
3+	221	156-267	242	216-277	28.2	25.5-31.4

Events

Lowland Sheep Walk - August 23rd: Farm of Des Powell Templederry, Co. Tipperary E45 AY99. Focus on preparing the breeding

Hill Sheep Walk - August 24th: Farm of Paul Boyle Tymeen, Letterbarrow Co. Donegal. Focus on store lamb options and preparing for breeding

Both events will be signposted locally.