

BETTER Farm update October 2023

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Grass growth rates across the Teagasc BETTER sheep flocks has been ahead of where it was this time last year during the last couple of weeks. This will make it easier for flocks to build covers coming into to autumn and ensure ewes and lambs are both receiving good quality grass. This is particularly helpful with a number of the flocks reporting that lamb-drafting rates are behind where they would like them to be. It will be vitally important though that even if supplies are plentiful that the autumn closing plan is implemented on time to ensure there is sufficient grass next spring. Flocks will start closing paddocks in rotation 120 days prior to target turn out date with the target being to have 20% of the farm closed by late October. Planning for this needs to begin straight away to ensure that rotation allows for the paddocks intended for grazing first next spring are closed first. Sheltered paddocks close to the yard will be prioritised, as these are where ewes and lambs will be turned out to first with the farms closing in rotation from there.

The lowland flocks will be joining the ewes with the rams this month and will be raddling rams throughout the mating process with colours changed regularly throughout mating which will help at housing time as well as identifying potential issues with ram fertility. The rams will be joined for a maximum of 6 weeks but some flocks will be pulling the rams out after 5 weeks with the ewes. While this can seem short, the majority of ewes' lambs in the first 3 weeks after the ram is joined to ewes in reasonable BCS as shown in Table 1. Leaving the ram in longer than 5-6 weeks prolongs lambing for a very small number of ewes and takes attention away from the ewes and lambs already out at grass. No different to a grass-closing plan the decisions we make at this time of year with ewes and rams will be felt next spring.

Table 1. Mating BCS and % of mature ewes lambled in the first 3 weeks of lambing in 2023 on 5 of the lowland Teagasc BETTER sheep flocks.

<i>Flock</i>	<i>Carlow</i>	<i>Sligo</i>	<i>Roscommon</i>	<i>Kerry</i>	<i>Tipperary</i>
<i>Mating BCS</i>	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.1
<i>% Lambled in 3 weeks</i>	92	85	89	86	90