

## BETTER Farm Update June 2021

Frank Campion, Animal & Grassland Research & Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway.

Grass growth for the BETTER sheep farms has been variable during the month of May with supplies behind where they were last year when a number of the farms had silage made in early May. At the time of writing none of the flocks have made silage yet but grass growth rates are rising to more normal levels with the group averaging 62kg DM/Ha/day in mid-May with some flocks growing up to 88kg DM/Ha/day. As growth rates rise and lambs become more reliant on grass to drive performance as they grow older ensuring that the flock has good quality grass in front of it is vital to keeping lambs performing up to weaning time. The flocks will be targeting 10 grazing days ahead from early June and will be dropping out paddocks and sub-dividing paddocks as necessary to keep to this target and optimise performance of the flock.

Most of the lowland flocks have completed the seven week lamb weights for the lambs from the mature ewes as presented in Table 1. Lamb growth rates to seven weeks are on target for most of the flocks and indeed have exceeded that in some cases. Performance to seven weeks is largely a reflection of the ewe's milk production and as a result these weights are not only an important indicator of current performance but also be used by the flocks when selecting replacement ewe lambs later in the year. Flocks have also begun sending lamb dung samples for FECPAK analysis and will continue to do this over the coming months to assess when lambs need anthelmintic treatments.

Table 1. Mean lamb performance from the lowland flocks from birth to 7 weeks of age with range in brackets

<b>Birth Type</b>	<b>Birth Weight (kg)</b>	<b>Growth Rate (g/day)</b>	<b>7 Week Weight (kg)</b>
<b>1</b>	6.0 (5.2-6.7)	344 (323-381)	23.0 (22.1-25.3)
<b>2</b>	5.2 (4.6-5.5)	294 (277-321)	19.6 (18.3-21.2)
<b>3+*</b>	4.4 (3.7-4.8)	286 (260-330)	18.5 (16.5-21.2)

\*Born as triplets and reared as twins

Where possible the hill flocks have begun letting single rearing ewes and their lambs back out to the hill with anecdotal evidence from the flocks suggesting that lambs are doing well so far this year. These lambs will be weighed at 7 weeks of age also when a more detailed assessment of the performance to date can be made.