

BETTER Farm update December 2021

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Ewe BCS on the BETTER hill sheep farms is presented in Table 1. The condition of hill ewes going to the ram this year was variable within the flocks with the average for some of the flocks falling just short of target of 3.0 for hill ewes at mating. Rams were introduced between the 1st and 15th of November depending on the flock and once mating is finished ewes will go back to the hill until scanning time.

The new flock recruited in Co. Carlow runs a small early season flock alongside the main mid-season flock of ewes and the early ewes pregnancy scanned in early November. The ram was joined with these ewes without the ewes going through a synchronisation procedure in August and the ram was removed after 4 weeks. The pregnancy rate was 87% with a scanned litter size of 1.75. The ram was re-introduced to this group at the same time as rams were joined with the mid-season group in early October in order to pick up any ewes that had not held to the ram during the early mating period.

Mating is nearly complete for the lowland flocks rams will be taken away 5-6 weeks after being introduced. Keeping the mating period restricted to 5-6 weeks will ensure lambing is compact next spring and it is important to keep this in mind when tempted with leaving the ram out longer at this time of year. Currently silage samples are being taken across the flocks for analysis which will be used to inform the winter feeding programme once ewes are housed.

Table 1. Initial analysis of mature ewe live weight and BCS on four of the hill sheep flocks.

| Flock | Boyle | Fitzgerald | Gonley | O'Toole |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| County | Donegal | Kerry | Sligo | Galway |
| Mean live weight (kg) | 53.0 | 54.4 | 49.2 | 48.2 |

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| Mean BCS | 3.0 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 3.0 |
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