

## BETTER Farm Update March 2021

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Nearly all of the Teagasc BETTER Farm hill sheep flocks have finished pregnancy scanning in the past couple of weeks and overall the scanning rates and litter sizes are quite good as presented in Table 1. Pregnancy rates this year are good across nearly all the flocks with the exception of one flock where nearly 25% of the ewes scanned empty. On the farm in question ewe condition and mating management appear not to be the issues and raddle marks from rams didn't highlight high levels of ewes repeating after the first cycle. As a result the farmer's local vet has been brought in on the issue and blood samples have been taken to investigate any potential underlying issues that may be causing the problem. The scanned litter sizes are good across the flocks are ranging from 1.3 to 1.5 which are high levels of output for hill flocks.

**Table 1.** Pregnancy scanning results from the BETTER farm hill sheep flocks.

| Location                      | Donegal | Mayo | Wicklow | Kerry | Sligo | Galway |
|-------------------------------|---------|------|---------|-------|-------|--------|
| <b>Scanned Litter size</b>    | 1.4     | 1.4  | 1.3     | 1.5   | 1.3   | 1.5    |
| <b>Scanned Pregnancy rate</b> | 97.7    | 95.7 | 91.5    | 75.6  | 93.2  | 98.5   |
| <b>Scanning rate</b>          | 1.4     | 1.3  | 1.2     | 1.1   | 1.2   | 1.5    |

On the lowland flocks March will see lambing in full flow. Pre-lambing grass covers are showing that most of the flocks are on target to have enough grass supplies. However, recent weather conditions have meant that at the time of writing none of the farms have been able to spread nitrogen and ground conditions are very soft on most farms. If this persists grass supplies could tighten quickly while utilisation of the grass available will be low on heavier farms. Weather and ground conditions can change quickly at this time of year but careful monitoring of available grass on the farms will be required to ensure remedial action is taken in time where necessary. As presented in Table 2. The flocks lambing yearling ewes have completed this task also. Results across the flocks were variable but most of the flock performed ok. These ewes and their lambs will be managed as a separate group until weaning time.

**Table 2.** Pregnancy scanning results from yearling ewes on the BETTER farm sheep flocks.

| Location                          | Sligo | Roscommon | Leitrim | Kerry | Tipperary | Wicklow |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----------|---------|-------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Scanned Litter size</b>        | 1.4   | 1.4       | 1.7     | 1.5   | 1.5       | 1.2     |
| <b>Scanned Pregnancy rate (%)</b> | 88.4  | 85.3      | 73.1    | 83.7  | 59.7      | 76.2    |
| <b>Scanning rate</b>              | 1.2   | 1.2       | 1.2     | 1.3   | 0.9       | 0.9     |