

## **BETTER Farm update October 2021**

Frank Champion, Animal & Grassland Research & Innovation Centre, Athenry.

October time signals the beginning of the next production year on most of the lowland BETTER sheep farms with ewes been joined to rams and farms starting to put into action their autumn closing plan. The target will be to start closing paddocks in rotation 120 days prior to target turn out date with 20% of the farm closed by late October. 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. For the new flock in Co. Carlow where there is also an early lambing flock this process has already begun with some paddocks being closed in early October to ensure sufficient covers for mid-January.

For the mating season the plan for the lowland flocks is to join the rams with the ewes for no more than 6 weeks to ensure lambing is compact. Rams will be raddled and the colour changed frequently so as to identify rams that are not performing but also to allow later lambing ewes and repeats to be fed separately where possible during late pregnancy. Thin ewes that were separated for preferential feeding in the build up to mating are being assessed regularly and any ewes that are have not recovered sufficient body condition prior to mating will be culled.

For the hill flocks in the programme mating is not quite as close on the horizon but is still coming into focus. Ewe BCS is has been consistently shown over the years to have a huge influence on pregnancy rates in hill ewes. While grass will be limited on some of these farms and it will be prioritised towards ewes at this time of the year and at mating as opposed to lambs, which where grass supplies are limited are being sold as stores.