

BETTER Farm update October 2022

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

The mid-season flocks are just on the point of beginning the breeding season. Flocks will begin joining rams between the 1st and 26th of October depending on desired lambing date. Ewes were checked in August and cull ewes removed with thin ewes separated for preferential feeding in order to try and re-build body condition. Ewes marked as thin but that fail to re-gain condition prior to mating will be culled prior to rams being joined as these ewes most likely have an underlying condition and have a high likelihood of being problem ewes later in the year. Once joined 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. Separating repeats and later lambing ewes at housing time will reduce the risk of ewes being overfed in the run up to lambing and reduce feeding costs.

Rams will remain with ewes for approximately 5-6 weeks. Leaving rams in longer than this can seem advantageous at this time of year to potentially increase pregnancy rate but analysis of data on the lowland BETTER sheep flocks last year has shown that this is not necessarily the case. Across 5 of the lowland flocks last year where sufficient rams were joined with ewes and pre-mating ewe BCS was correct the average scanning pregnancy rate was 96% (range 93-98) with 90% of the in lamb ewes lambing in the first 3 weeks of lambing. A compact lambing will reduce workload and costs at time of year when both can be high on farms.