

BETTER Farm update

Lambing of the Mid-season flocks is almost complete for the adult ewes with only yearlings remaining in most flocks, Overall lambing went well of the flocks, with higher lamb numbers this year on most farms – due to better scans and increased ewe numbers. Extra time was spent this season identifying and recording problem ewes with the intention of identifying these for culling or not using them to produce future replacement s next Autumn.

The key management task during April will be establishing grazing groups, in all cases these will be established on the basis of age with the intention to limit the number of groups to 2 to 3 in most cases. This process will be complete by the time lambs are receiving their first dose at 6 to 7 weeks. Fewer grazing groups on the farm will lead to more effective grazing management and help reduce the residency period in each field.

Opening covers were good on the farms however many encountered difficulties in getting the first application of fertilizer applied due to ground conditions in early March will effect early grass production on individual farms. Grass growth rates have been variable (2 to 20 kg/Dm/ha) with an average of 13 kg/Dm/ha during March.

The two flocks with an early flocks component will start drafting lambs in later March/early April as lambs coming fit for slaughter, target drafting weight is 39 to 40 kg for these flocks, given the costs involved in these systems its vital the monitor drafting closely.

The hill flock will begin lambing in late march into early April. This year 2 of the flocks will be recording lambing information on individual rams. In David McLaughlin's flock in Donegal, five Lanark rams are being evaluated and four recorded Cheviot rams being evaluated in Patrick Dunne's flock. In each case information on lamb survival, growth rate and in coming season's performance of the female progeny will be recorded. This information will feed into the Sheep Ireland system to help improve the evaluation process for each respective breed.