



BETTER

Business, Environment and Technology through Training, Extension and Research

Hill Sheep Farm Walk

September 13th 2018

Farm of Denis O’Riordan

Curramore, Kealkill, Co. Cork.



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

**This is a Department approved Knowledge
Transfer Sheep Event**



Ireland's European Structural and
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"The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas."

Introduction

We welcome you to today's event on the farm of Denis O'Riordan where he operates a hill sheep and cattle farm. Today's walk will focus on his hill sheep enterprise and some of the ongoing changes being made as part of Denis's involvement in the BETTER farm sheep programme.

There will be a specific focus on four main areas today including:

- Farm layout and structure
- Hill grazing management
- Flock breeding policy
- Lamb performance and options for finishing hill lambs

Each of these stands will provide you with an opportunity to engage with the speakers on a variety of topics, which we encourage you to avail of. This is a national qualifying event for the Knowledge Transfer Programme (year 3) and we would encourage participants to ensure they register with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at the event.

Finally, we would like thank Denis and his family for their continued participation in the BETTER farm sheep programme and opening his farm today.



Farm Details

Farm size

- Hill grazing (271 ha)
 - 60 ha fenced off
- Green land 8 ha
- Out farm 8 ha of green land
- Hill Sheep & Beef (Sucklers)

Ewe flock

- Approx. 300 Blackface ewes
- Ewe flock out wintered on the hill
- Brought down to enclosed land in mid-February
- Supplemented based on scanning results
- Ewes lambed outdoors on enclosed land

Farm Plan

1. Breeding Policy

- Compare traditional Blackface rams used with Swaledale's & Lanark's
- Breed bottom 25% of ewes to Suffolk rams
- Try and breed ewe lambs at 18 months versus 30 months

2. Flock Management

- Pregnancy scanning ewes and separating twins for late pregnancy
- Feeding a balanced ration to ewes for last month of pregnancy

3. Lambs

- Targeted management plan for lambs based on weights
- Selling some lambs as stores and finishing some lambs on farm also

4. Soil fertility

- Being addressed across the farm to improve 'green' ground

Flock Performance

Table 1. Summary of O’Riordan’s flock performance over the past 3 seasons

| | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Ewes Joined | 285 | 290 | 313 |
| Ewes lambled (%) | 95 | 94 | 90 |
| Litter Size | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.2 |
| Lambs reared/ewe joined | 1.1 | 1.1 | 0.90 |

- Focused on improving output per ewe and lamb performance
- Started pregnancy scanning in 2016/17
- Lambing from ~ 6th of April onwards
- Maximising use of enclosed land
 - Poor autumn and spring weather conditions have reduced flock performance this year (2017/18), however the flock is still performing above national average



Table 2. Lamb performance on O’Riordan’s farm in 2018

| Birth Type | Birth Weight (kg) | Weaning Weight (kg) |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | 5.5 | 27.1 |
| 2 | 4.6 | 24.5 |

Table 3. Breakdown of lamb weights on O’Riordan’s farm in late August/ early September 2018

| Category | % |
|-----------------|----------|
| <25 kg | 14 |
| 25–30 kg | 28 |
| 30–35 kg | 39 |
| >35 kg | 19 |

Hill Grazing Management

Weaning to Mating (Ewes weaned end of August)

- All Ewes go back to hill after weaning
- Replacement ewe lambs go back to hill
- Remaining lambs and cull ewes graze on lower ground
- Replacement hoggets on hill at this time also

Mating to Lambing (Ewes joined with rams ~ 10th of November)

- Ewes are mated on lower ground (green fields etc.)
- Ewe lambs left on the hill
- After mating all ewes go back to the hill
- February - scanning – after which everything kept on lower ground until after lambing

Lambing (April 5th onwards)

- All ewes brought in to closed in ground and fed as required immediately prior lambing
- From 20th of May singles start to go back to the hill

Lambing to Weaning

- Twin rearing ewes and ewes rearing Suffolk X lambs remain on lower ground until nearly weaning

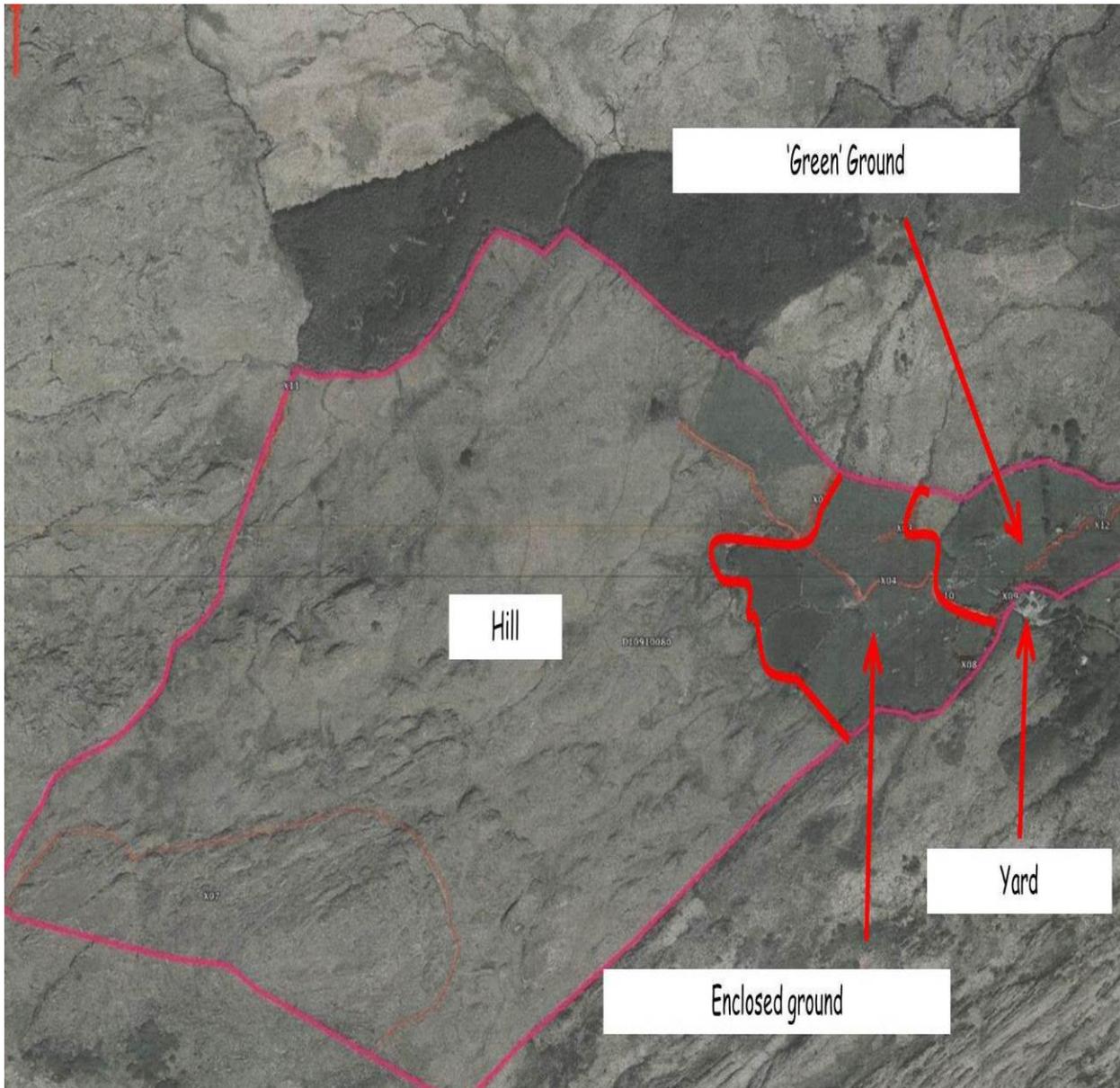
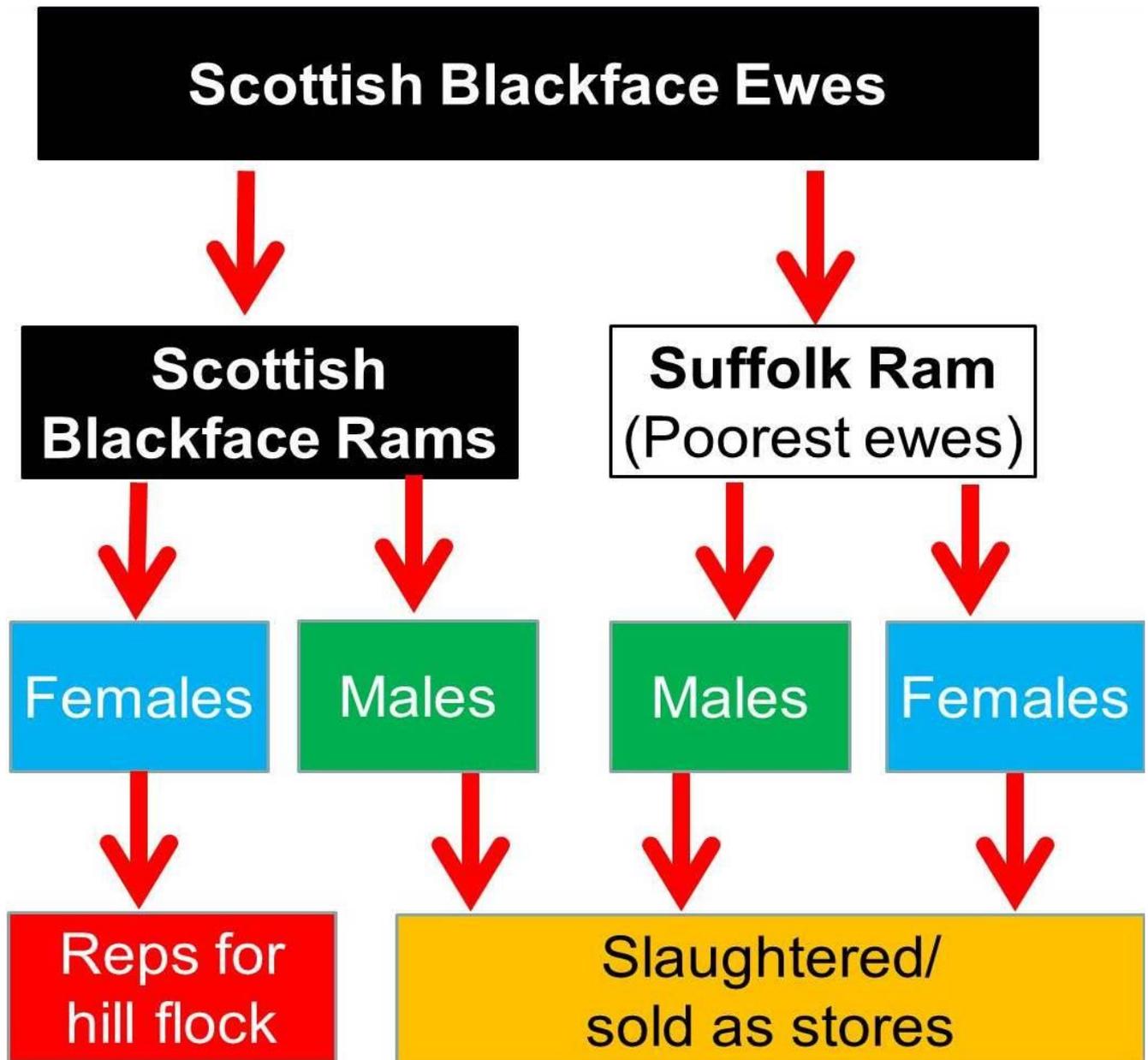


Figure 1. Map of the main hill grazing block on O’Riordan’s farm

Breeding Policy



- Crossbreeding bottom 25% of ewes based on age and BCS yearly
- Currently evaluating using different breeding options such as using Lanark rams on the hill flock
- Replacements now bred at 18 months as opposed to 30 months

Notes