



Sheep Farm Walk  
 August 2nd 2018  
 Farm of John Doyle,  
 Ballindaggin, Enniscorthy,  
 Co. Wexford.




 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  
 Investment Funds Programmes  
 2014-2020  
 Co-funded by the Irish Government  
 and the European Union


 "The European Agricultural Fund  
 for Rural Development, Europe  
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## **Introduction**

We would like to welcome you to today's event where you will hear about some of the changes made on John Doyle's farm as part of his involvement in the Teagasc BETTER farm Sheep Programme and also discussion around dealing with the current challenging farming conditions in the South East. John operates a mixed farming enterprise (sheep, beef and tillage) with his wife Hannah and their children and has been part of the BETTER farm programme since 2012. The changes implemented on the farm since John joined the BETTER farm program have helped improve the efficiency and output from the flock as you will hear today. This spring/summer has also posed unprecedented challenges for farmers and dealing with these challenges heading into the autumn will be discussed.

There are 4 stands which will discuss:

- Farming system and farm plan
- Lamb performance and grassland management
- Re-building winter fodder supplies and forage crops
- Flock breeding and managing ewe BCS

Each of these stands will provide you with an opportunity to engage with the speakers on a variety of topics. This is a national qualifying event for the Knowledge Transfer Programme (KT) and we would encourage participants to ensure they register with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at the event. We would like to conclude by thanking the Doyle family for their continued participation in the Sheep BETTER farm programme and opening their farm today.

### **Farm Details**

- 66.5 adjusted ha – 50.25 ha grassland, remainder spring barley and forage crops
  - 3 main splits
- Farm system
  - Mixed enterprise system – Sheep, beef and tillage
  - Sheep System 2017/18:
    - 440 ewes including replacements (lambing)
      - 85 early lambing ewes
      - 280 mid-season lambing ewes
      - 75 replacement ewe lambs lambing @ 12 months old
    - Early lambing ewes lamb in two batches 10 days apart from January 2<sup>nd</sup> onwards
      - System being reviewed - no early lambing for 2018/19 season
    - Mid-season ewes lamb from March 1<sup>st</sup> onwards
    - Ewe lambs lamb from March 17<sup>th</sup> onwards
- Proportion of ewe lambs sold for breeding
- Ewes grazed on forage rape and turnips during the winter months
- All ewes housed for last 4-6 weeks pre lambing

### **Farm Plan**

- Focused on 2 key areas to improve profitability
- 1. Breeding
  - Increasing ewe numbers to 400
  - Split flock to allow for expansion
    - All mid-season lambing for 2018/19
  - Increase ewe output – more prolific sires
  - Joining ewe lambs
- 2. Grassland
  - Target grazing areas e.g. early lamb flock
  - Address soil fertility issues
  - Improve grazing infrastructure – permanent and temporary divisions
  - Reseeding – part of tillage rotation
  - Grass measuring and budgeting – using Pasturebase

## Flock Performance

**Table 1.** Performance of the mid-season and yearling flock in 2018

	Mid-season flock	Yearling flock
<b>Litter size</b>	1.92	1.36
<b>Ewes lambled (%)</b>	94	92
<b>Lambs reared per ewe joined</b>	1.58	1.09

- Focused on improving output
  - Target to wean in excess of 1.6 lambs per ewe joined
  - Maximise contribution of grazed grass in the lambs diet
  - Produce replacements for sale
- Increase in ewe numbers since 2012
- Weaning an extra 350+ lambs since joining the program

## Lamb Performance

- Early lambs weaned at 8 weeks old and finished off grass and concentrate diet
- Aim to finish Mid-season lambs finished predominantly off grass
- Aiming to reduce concentrate input for mid-season lambs

**Table 2.** Weaning weights for lambs from the early lambing flock (8 weeks post-lambing), mid-season flock and yearling flock (14 weeks post-lambing) for the 2017/18 season

<b>Litter Size</b>	<b>Early flock (kg)*</b>	<b>Mid-season flock (kg)</b>	<b>Yearling flock(kg)</b>
<b>Singles</b>	24.6	35.1	30.3
<b>Twins</b>	22.0	29.5	25.3
<b>Triplets</b>	20.1	26.9	-

\*Early flock weaned at 8 weeks post-lambing

## Parasite control

### Early lambs

- Dosed against Coccidiosis using a Diclazuril based product at ~21 days old
- Treated twice (4 weeks apart) for Nematodiosis (stomach worms) in March/April using a Benzimidazole (1-BZ; white drench) based product.

### Mid-season lambs

- Mid-season lambs treated twice (3 weeks apart) for Nematodiosis (stomach worms) in April using a Benzimidazole (1-BZ; white drench)
  - Some lambs got a second Nematodirus dose this year
- Worm burdens monitored using faecal egg counts
- Dung samples collected from lambs at fortnightly intervals from late May
- Subsequent anthelmintic treatments are based on results from faecal egg counts
- Worm burdens treated two times this year so far using a Macrocytic Lactone (3- ML; clear drench) based product

### Yearling Lambs

- Dosed against Coccidiosis using a Diclazuril based product at ~21 days old
- Same as Mid-season lambs thereafter
- Fluke control monitored throughout the grazing season - factory
  - All ewes dosed with Triclabendazole-based product in September
  - Mid-season ewes dosed with a Macrocytic Lactone (3-ML; clear drench) in September



## Flock health

- Clostridial diseases
  - Replacement ewe lambs receive initial vaccine in September and booster 4-6 weeks apart in September
  - Ewes receive annual booster 3 weeks pre lambing
  - Mid-season lambs received a vaccination in April this year
- Lameness
  - All sheep are foot bathed using copper sulphate & zinc sulphate
  - Problem individuals are treated with an antibiotic
- Ewe lambs to receive a toxoplasmosis vaccine prior to breeding
- Enzootic abortion not a problem – closed flock
- Blow Fly
  - Ewes plunged dipped
  - Lambs receive a pour-on
  - Lambs 2018 – Early June



## Breeding policy

- Rotational crossing system
- Terminal X Maternal back cross used on mid-season flock - Suffolk X Belclare
- Texel X Suffolk cross used on early lambing ewes
- Replacements produced from own flock and bred as ewe lambs
- Ewe lambs mated to a Charollais ram
- Using performance recorded rams on the flock

### Current Grassland Management

**Table 3.** Grass cover taken on Doyle's farm Monday showing the grass supply with and without current levels of supplementation

Cover Date	30/07/2018	
	Without supp.	With supp.
Farm Cover (kg DM/ha)	389	389
Cover / LU (kg DM/LU)	188	188
Growth / ha (kg DM/ha/day)	19	19
Demand / ha (kg DM/ha/day)	39	21
Demand / day (kg DM/day)	1806	979
Days ahead	10	19
Kg LWT / ha	1627	1627

#### Days Ahead

Target **17** grazing days ahead for Early August extending to **20** by start of September

**How do we manage re-building grass supplies?**

#### Example:

Farm Cover = 389 kg DM/Ha/Day

Demand/ Day = 39 kg DM/Ha/Day

Days ahead without supplementation = 10

Days ahead with current supplementation levels = 19

- Doyle' supplementing ewes, lambs and cows to reduce grass demand and allow grass covers to build
- Normal days ahead targets need to be adjusted up for this year to allow grass covers to re-build

## Notes