

BETTER

Business, Environment and Technology through Training, Extension and Research

Hill Sheep Farm Walk

September 10th 2019

Farm of John Joe Fitzgerald

Ballydavid, Tralee, Co. Kerry



Introduction

We welcome you to today's event on the farm of John Joe Fitzgerald where he operates a hill sheep farm alongside his wife, Karen, and their children. Today's walk will focus on some of the planned changes being made as part of John Joe's involvement in the BETTER farm sheep programme. John Joe joined the programme last November and this walk will highlight some of the planned changes and detailed farm plan developed for this farm to maximise output and financial income.

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

- Farm layout and structure
- Hill grazing management
- Store lamb finishing
- Handling units

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.

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



Farm Layout

- Hill grazing
 - Commonage (80 ha share)
 - 11 ha fenced off area rented
- Enclosed green land - 12 ha

Ewe flock

- Approx. 150 ewes - mix of Scottish Blackface & Texel/Belclare crossbred ewes
- Ewe flock out wintered on the hill
- Brought down to enclosed land in March until after lambing
- Supplemented as required prior to lambing
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Breeding Policy

- Currently using Scottish Blackface , Texel and Belclare rams
 - Keeping replacements from all
- Moving towards a fully Scottish Blackface ewe flock
- Stick to only one ram breed for crossbreeding
 - Sell all lambs from these rams

Flock Management

- Start pregnancy scanning ewes and separating twins for late pregnancy
- Reduce concentrate costs
 - Targeted management of lamb crop
 - Sell stores and finish most forward lambs

Grazing management

- Lime spread this year to address pH issues
- Temporary fencing being used on enclosed green ground
- Plan to start making better use of hill for grazing ewe flock

Flock Performance

Table 1. Summary of Fitzgerald's flock performance this year

	2017/18
Ewes Joined	151
Ewes lambled (%)	88.2
Litter Size	1.18
Lambs reared/ewe joined	1.07

- Mating live weight and BCS below target in 2018
 - Major contributor to low pregnancy rate
- First year pregnancy scanning
 - Better management of twin bearing ewes
- Lambled outdoors from ~ 6th April onwards
- Target lambs reared/ewe joined > 1.0

Table 2. Lamb performance on Fitzgerald’s farm in 2018

Birth Type	Birth Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)
1	4.6	23.7
2	3.9	20.3

Table 3. Breakdown of lamb weights on Fitzgerald’s farm at weaning in early August

Category	%
<25 kg	40.7
25–30 kg	32.1
30–35 kg	23.5
>35 kg	3.7

Grazing Management

What is the enclosed ground used for?

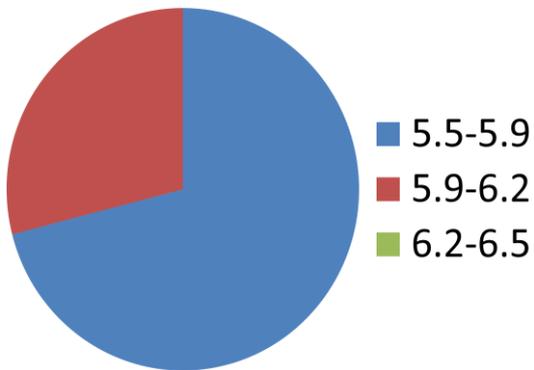
- Ewes and lambs turned out here after lambing
- Ewes rearing replacement ewe lambs go to the hill with their lambs before weaning
- After weaning enclosed ground kept for lambs
- Ewes mated on enclosed ground and returned to hill afterwards
- Thin ewes kept here after scanning

Improving grass output

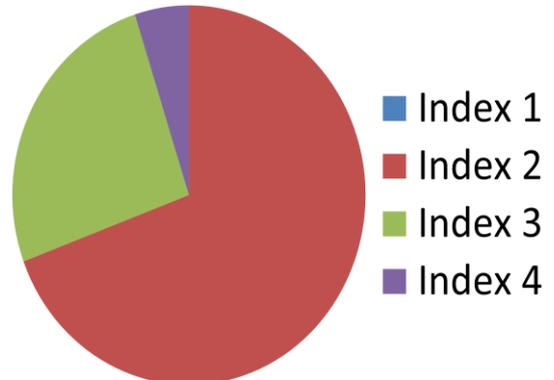
- Increased grazing divisions
- Addressing soil fertility issues

Fitzgerald's Soil Fertility Status

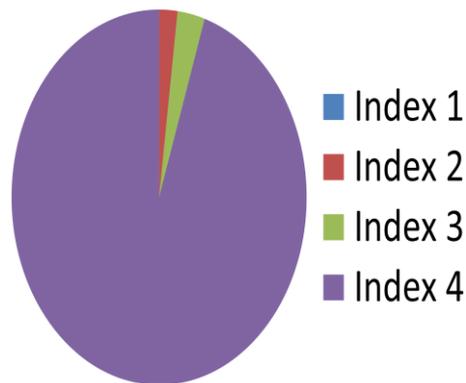
Soil pH Status



P Index



K Index



- Soil pH status needs improvement, none of the farm is the correct pH for grass
 - Lime spread this year to attempt to address this
- Phosphorous index Index 2 for most of the farm
 - Improving soil pH will help release phosphorous and improve indexes
- Potassium (K) indexes very good on the farm

Store Lamb Finishing

On any hill sheep farm the ewe flock should get priority access to grass in order to ensure ewes are in good BCS at mating time and if necessary there is enough grass available to sustain the ewe flock until they return to the hill post-mating. This usually means selling a large proportion of the lamb crop as stores. However for those who decide to finish lamb on ad-lib concentrates there are a few important guidelines to follow:

- It will be necessary to train lambs to eat concentrates 2-3 weeks prior to housing – outdoor with creep feeders/trough or indoors with access to roughage.
- Never introduce lambs to concentrate feed when they are fasted
- If finishing lambs on an all concentrate diet, ensure diet is formulated for this purpose, initially offer 300 g/lamb/day and increase by 200 g/lamb/day every 3 days until full feeding, and continue to offer a small quantity of long roughage (hay, silage, or straw). Ensure that lambs have water at all times.
- Each lamb should be allocated at least 0.8m² of floor space.
- Ensure that the sheep house is well ventilated and adequately bedded with straw in bedded sheds.
- Ensure that there is adequate trough space for lambs –especially during the time that they are being built up to ad-lib concentrates. (need 30cm per lamb of trough space)
- If lambs are being fed indoors ensure that a clean fresh supply of water is available at all times
- Carefully examine declared ingredients list to assess ration quality
- Avoid too much starch or finely ground ingredients.
- Coarse or slightly cracked ingredients are more slowly digested and, therefore, create a safer feed. However, the downside is that coarse feeds tend to attract birds and lambs tend to sort and leave behind unpalatable ingredients (rapeseed, distillers etc.)
- Mineral and vitamin inclusion essential for longer feeding periods. Ensure that the mineral and vitamin mix included in the ration is specific for intensive finishing of lambs
- If finishing males lambs include ammonium chloride for long keep lambs to prevent urinary calculi. Inclusion rate is 0.5% or 5 kg per tonne.
- There should be no need for additional mineral and vitamin supplementation where properly balanced concentrates are being fed.
- If lambs are being fed indoors ensure that concentrate feed is available at all times.
- Purchased lambs should, on arrival on the farm, be given a “quarantine” dose for gastrointestinal worms and liver fluke, foot bathed and housed for 48 hours.
- Plunge dip or inject with macrocyclic lactone group product to control sheep scab.
- Long-stay (> 6weeks) lambs may benefit from vaccination against clostridial diseases and pasturella pneumonia.
- Canine tapeworm infection can be eliminated with regular (monthly) worming of dogs using praziquantel.
- Prompt removal and or correct storage of sheep carcasses to avoid scavenging by dogs and foxes. Keep dogs away from sheep feed.

Best Practice Sheep Dipping

- Sheep dips extremely toxic chemicals
- Significant risk to water quality & aquatic life



Ectoparasite Control

- Is dipping sheep the most effective method of ectoparasite control?
- Use pour-ons – dry sheep & dry weather for 24 hours following use
- Use injectables e.g. ivermectins for lice, mites etc.

Dipping Procedure

- Dipping tank area sound and leakproof
- Don't dip if rain is forecast
- Hold dipped sheep in drip pens for 10 minutes **and collect all drip from dipped sheep**
- **Holding pens after dipping must be concreted**
- Do not allow dipped sheep access to drains or waterbodies
- Hold dipped sheep for 24 hours in an area without access to waterbody
- Select sites for use of mobile dippers to prevent water contamination.



Best Practice Sheep Dipping

Dip Disposal

- Plan used sheep dip disposal
- Wash dipping area thoroughly & collect washing in dip tank
- Used Dip Disposal: Mix minimum 1:3 parts slurry/water
- Landspread the mix @ 1760gals/acre (20m³/ha) – respect buffer areas
- Contract mobile dip - ensure used dip is properly disposed of

Following Dipping

- Rinse used containers and lids 3 times into dipping tank
- Remove dip containers and lids from tank area after use and dispose properly
- Avoid transport of wet sheep following dipping



Stop Every Drop!