

Farm of
John O'Connell
Ballinamore,
Co. Leitrim



This is a DAFM approved Knowledge Transfer
Sheep Event



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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Europe Investing in rural areas)



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

Introduction

We welcome you to today's event where you will hear about the on-going changes on John O'Connell's farm as part of his involvement in the Sheep BETTER farm Programme. John operates a sheep and cattle farm. In total 250 ewes are lambed. The farm also supports a dairy heifer contract rearing system. The changes implemented on the farm since John joined the BETTER farm sheep program in 2014 have helped improve the efficiency and output from the flock as you will hear in more detail today.

There are 4 stands which will discuss:

- Farm layout, farm plan and flock performance
- Flock breeding
- Grazing infrastructure and grassland management
- Lamb performance

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 do. This is a national qualifying event for the Knowledge Transfer Programme (Year 1) 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 the O'Connell family for their continued participation in the Sheep BETTER farm programme and opening their farm today.

Farm details

- 34 ha of grazing ground
- 2 main blocks
 - Home farm
 - 16.5 ha mainly used for mainly for sheep
 - Fohera,
 - 17.1 ha mainly being used for contract rearing heifers
- Mixed grazed beef and sheep farm
 - 250 breeding ewes (including replacements) joined in 2016/17 season
 - Stocking rate of 10 ewes/ha (farm target)
 - Contract rearing dairy heifers
 - 30 heifers arrive on 1 December
 - Leave again on 1 Dec following year when new batch arrive
 - Winter housing and feeding suckler cows
- Sheep system yielded a gross margin of €580 per hectare in 2016

Farm Plan

- Increase farm stocking rate to 10 ewes/ha
- Increase ewe numbers
- Change from a suckler cow beef system to contract rearing dairy heifers
- Improve grassland management
 - Address soil fertility issues (Lime and chemical P & K)
 - Increase number of grazing divisions
 - Implement reseeding programme
 - Use grass budgeting
- Improve animal performance – from grass

Sheep System

Ewe breed: Belclare X Suffolk

Ram Breeds: Belclare, Suffolk, Texel & Blue de Maine

System management:

Mature ewe flock

- Lambed from 10th of March onwards
- Belclare, Suffolk and Texel rams used on mature ewes
- No supplementation offered during main part of grazing season
- Managed as a single group from around 1 month after lambing
- Target is to finish as many lambs as possible off grass only
- In 2016 lambs were finished off meal indoors once they reached 40kg live weight from September onwards due to very wet conditions

Yearlings

- Lambed from 20th March onwards
- Blue de Maine rams used
- Target minimum live weight of 45kg live weight at mating time
- Managed as separate group
- Lambs supplemented at grass

Artificially reared lambs

- Lamb feeder used 'EWE 2'
- Target 12.5 – 13.5 kg milk powder per lamb
- Lambs split on basis of age
- Weaned once consuming 250g/day conc. for 3 consecutive days (approx. 5 to 7 weeks)
- Turned out to on grass from weaning
- Supplementation continued at grass until mid-June then removed

Flock Performance

Table 1. Mid-season Mature Ewe Flock Productivity in 2014 and 2017

Year	Year 1	Current
	2014	2017
No of ewes joined	162	201
Pregnancy rate (%)	91	93
Litter size	1.82	1.93
Lambs reared per ewe joined	1.48	1.60
Lambs Reared	240	322

Table 2. Lamb performance to weaning 2016/17 season for the lambs from the mature ewe flock

Birth Type	Birth Weight (kg)	7 Week Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)
1	6.7	22.0	30.3
2	5.5	19.2	27.6
3+	4.6	17.9	26.2

Table 3. Lamb performance to weaning 2016/17 season for the lambs from the yearling ewe flock

Birth Type	Birth Weight (kg)	7 Week Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)
1	5.0	18.5	31.5
2	4.0	15.2	26.0

Cattle System

- Originally ran a suckler cow herd
- Changed system to a dairy replacement contract rearing system in 2015, but only began taking heifers in 2016
- Operates B&B system for Sucker cows from October To March

Currently:

- 30 dairy heifers on farm
 - Arrive on 1st Dec
 - Leave following Dec when new batch of heifers arrive
 - Heifers are mated on farm through mixture of A.I. and natural service
 - Kept on out farm in Fohera during grazing season
- B&B for suckler cows also during winter to make use of accommodation on out farm (Fohera) and surplus silage

Grassland

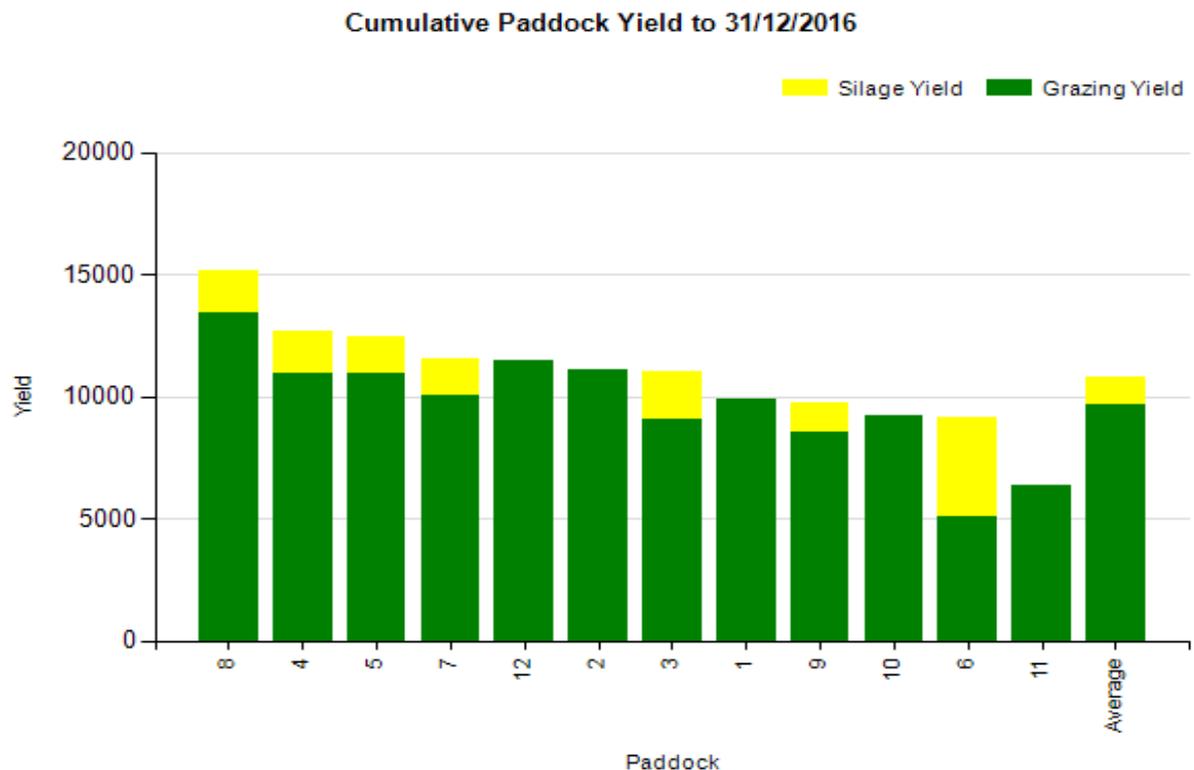


Figure 1. Cumulative paddock yield from 2016 on the home farm (Ballinamore).

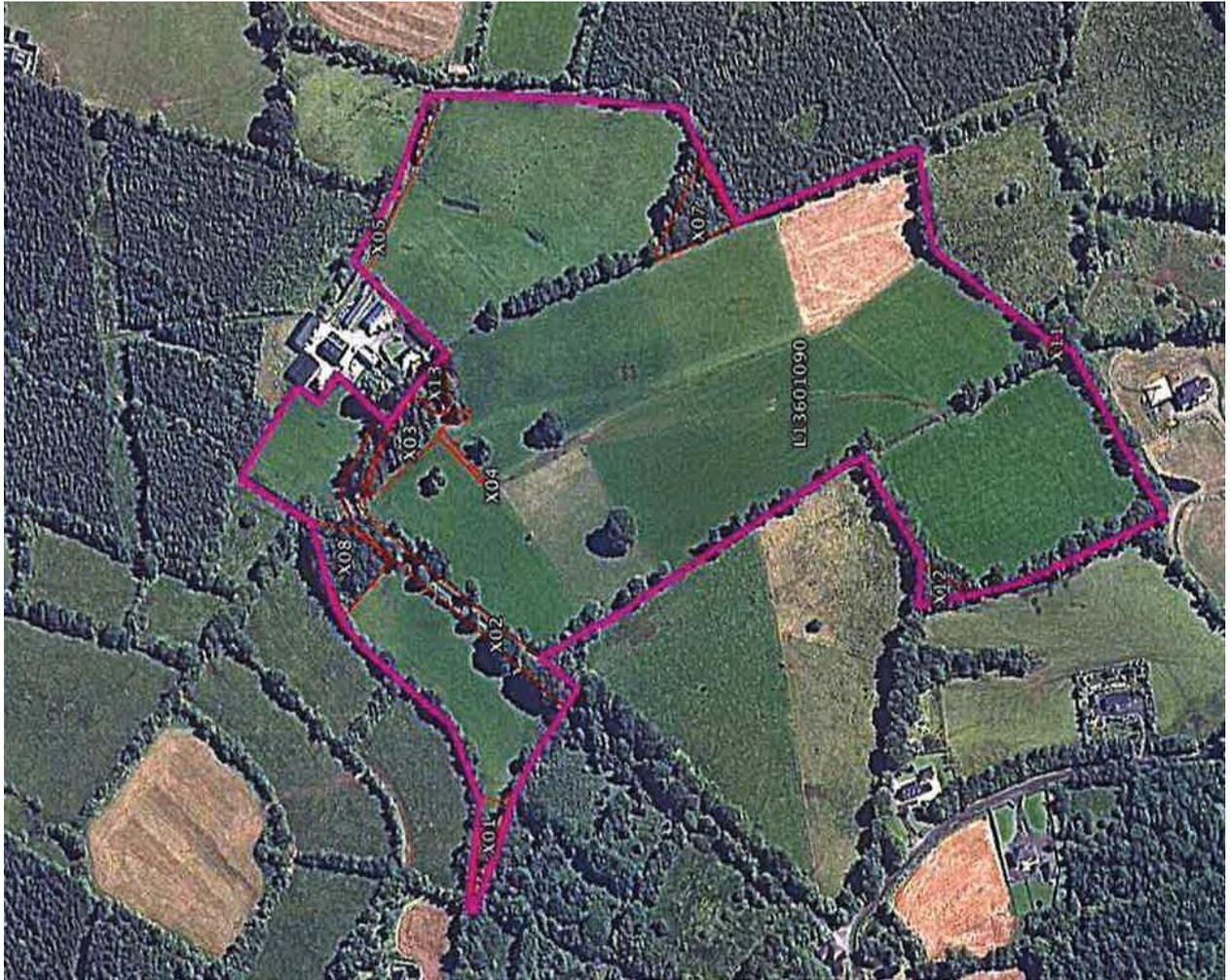


Figure 2. Farm map for farm in Cloverhill (Home Farm)

- Increased number of permanent divisions to 12
- Utilised TAMS
- Temporary divisions achieved with use of Electric Fencing
 - Flexi-net or 3 Strands Of Polytape
- Grew nearly 11 tonne grass DM per hectare in 2016 on the home block
- So far this year cumulative paddock yield is 30% ahead of this time last year
- Fields drained in previous seasons
- Reseeded 5 ha in 2016
- All paddocks received $\frac{3}{4}$ of a bag of urea on Feb 10th
- 1 bag of 18-6-12 applied after grazing
- Cattle slurry applied once silage cut from paddocks along with $\frac{3}{4}$ of a bag of urea

Notes