

## **Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, Athenry**

Philip Creighton, Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co Galway.

Lambing commenced on February 27th. At time of writing (March 20th), Progress has been good with just 25 ewes left to lamb (7%). Just over 80% of the ewes lambed in the first 17 days. Lamb mortality is running at approximately 8% on average. Lamb birth weights are ranging from 6.0kg for singles, 5.0kg for twins and 4.1kg for triplets. Measures of birth assistance show approximately 22% of the ewes required some level of assistance at lambing. This varied from very minimal help up to about 7% of ewes who required major or veterinary assistance at birth. Figures for lamb viability show that no single born lambs, 4% of twins and 18% of triplets requiring help to suckle or were artificially fed. With near perfect weather conditions freshly lambed ewes and lambs were spending 24-48hrs inside in individual penning and were then turned out to grass Urea was blanket spread on all farmlets at a rate of 42 kg N/ha (30 units/ac) on March 3rd. Grass growth has responded with growth rates of 15-20 kg DM/ha/day being recorded. Unfortunately due to the prolonged poor weather conditions in January and February and the delay in getting nitrogen applied overall farm cover is lower than required. Current growth rates are still not fully meeting demand which is currently 18 – 25kg DM/ha/day and so we have introduced concentrates to the ewes and lambs outdoors for a short period (7-10 days) to slow the rotation to allow sufficient grass reserves to build up. It is better to take corrective action now rather than running out of grass in early April when demand will be greatly increasing.