

Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, Athenry

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Grass growth has increased greatly since our last update. Average growth rates of 85kg DM/ha/day have been recorded in May so far. With demand currently between 50 (10 ewes/ha) and 70 (14 ewes/ha) kg DM/ha/day we closed 20% of all farmlet areas for silage the first week of May. All paddocks are now being subdivided into two sections for grazing. Sheep are spending 3-4 days in each section. This is allowing better utilisation of grass when grazing and allowing surpluses to be removed as baled silage. Current post grazing heights are ranging between 3.5 to 4.5cm. Up to mid-May a total of 85, 100, and 120kg N/ha had been applied in the 10, 12 and 14 ewe/ha groups respectively. All farmlets also received 30 Kg K/ha in early May based on soil fertility analysis. Lamb performance measured at 9 weeks was disappointing having dropped to between 220-260g/day. Dung samples revealed a *Nematodirus* and *Coccidia* challenge. While lambs had been treated for *Nematodirus* in late April a second hatch seems to have occurred following the rapid increase in temperatures. The extremely wet conditions during the second week of May could have contributed to the *coccidia* burden which can be brought on by stress.