

Scanning results from BETTER Farm Flocks

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The pregnancy scanning for the BETTER Farm flocks is nearly complete. Two of the hill farmers and all producers that joined ewe lambs have completed scanning. Scanning results provide a useful assessment of flock productivity by identifying areas where improvements can be made.

Colm O'Donnell and James Lally operate S.Blackface flocks in Co. Sligo and Co. Mayo respectively. Both of these hill flocks had good scan results and also there are very few barren ewes present (Table 1). A high incidence of barrenness has been a problem in previous years which was due to individual ram problems and a proportion of ewes being in poor condition during the mating season. Following scanning single bearing ewes in both flocks were sent to the hill whilst twin bearing ewes were retained on the closed land areas. Additionally, Colm O'Donnell joined a selection of mature ewes with a Texel ram in October, two weeks before the main flock was joined. These ewes were also retained on the closed land areas and will be managed separately approaching lambing.

Two of the lowland flocks in the BETTER Farm programme, John Curley in Co Roscommon and John Kelly in Co. Wicklow have continued to join replacement ewe lambs for the past few seasons. The results of this years scan for both flocks is summarised in Table 1. John Curley joined the 31 heaviest of his 62 replacement ewe lambs with a mature Charollais ram in mid October, two weeks after the main ewe flock was joined. At joining the ewe lambs had an average weight of 49.7 kg with a condition score of 3.6. Following lambing these yearling ewes will be managed as a separate group.

This year John Kelly joined all of his 183 ewe lamb replacements in mid October with mature Suffolk and Charollais rams. This occurred 1 week after the main ewe flock was joined and lasted for a period of 6 weeks. At joining these ewe lambs averaged 46.6 kg and had a condition score of 3.4. Considering the fact that the vast majority of these ewes were mated as determined by raddle marks during the 6 week breeding season the scanned pregnancy rate was only 52 %. In this case none of the obvious physical factors could explain the poor result, therefore blood samples were taken from a selection ewe lambs by his local vet. The results indicated that these lambs had become infected with Toxoplasmosis. When contracted in early pregnancy toxoplasmosis can result in resorption or mummification of foetuses. Potentially, it

may be a greater problem with ewe lambs rather than adult ewes, as they are less likely to have had an opportunity to develop immunity prior to joining.

Table 1. Scanning results for the flocks

	Flocks			
	O'Donnell Hill flock	Lally Hill flock	Curley Ewe lambs	Kelly Ewe lambs
Scanning rate	1.19	1.43	1.26	0.64
Pregnancy rate (%)	97.9	97.6	90.3	51.9
Scanned litter size	1.22	1.47	1.39	1.23