Most farmers were satisfied with the level of grass growth throughout late April and May. Grass quality was good and lambs performed well. However late May and June present different challenges. Where grass cover has been allowed to build up, quality can deteriorate very quickly. Seed heads are produced, the level of stem builds up and there is an increase in the amount of dead leaf at the base of the sward. Lambs perform very poorly on this type of pasture. When this arises, do not graze lambs below 5-6cm. Try to ensure lambs have leafy grass available at all times to maximise performance. When ewes are dried off later after weaning they can be used to graze out the pastures tightly. It is important to walk the paddocks weekly. When grass is grazed out to 4cm or lower, the resulting re-growth will be good quality.

Surplus grass
If grass covers exceed 8cm pre grazing, you are likely to be getting to a surplus situation. Have a go at estimating the grazing days ahead (number of days the grass available on grazing paddocks would last if growth stopped). If this exceeds 13 to 14 days in June, consider removing surplus grass as silage or introduce extra stock to graze out the surplus

STAP events
The following on-farm events/workshops will take place in June 2014. These will be of interest to sheep farmers who are members of the STAP programme.

Tuesday June 10  John O’Connell, Leitrim
Thursday June 12  Eamon Spillane, Tipperary

Grass management and soil fertility as well as flock health issues will be addressed at both events. If you wish to attend either of these events please contact your discussion group facilitator.
The only way you will know if performance is on target is to weigh some lambs. Pick out a sample of lambs. Select a range of sizes, including some small, medium and large lambs in the flock. Weigh these and record their weights. Put a permanent mark on them so you know which ones you weighed. Weigh them again two to three weeks later and calculate their daily live-weight gain. Twin lambs should gain 300g/day or a little over 2kg per week during their first 14 weeks of life. This will mean twin lambs born on March 10 should average 34kg live-weight by June 16, at 14 weeks of age. This 300g/day is a target for the whole flock of lambs. If growth rate is below target you should try to identify why. In this way corrective action can be taken to improve performance for the remainder of the year and to avoid the problem next year.

**Roundworms**
Dose based on fecal egg count results rather than routine dosing. Ask your adviser or veterinary surgeon for details.

**Sheep going on their backs**
Sheep going on their backs tends to be a problem at this time of year. They will die quickly so regular herding is a must. Some item in the field such as a purpose built scratching post or some old piece of machinery where sheep can scratch will help prevent this occurring. However, the best solution is to shear the sheep sooner rather than later. Shearing is advisable now in any case to protect sheep against blow fly attack and reduce heat stress.

**Blow fly control**
The risk of blow fly attack has increased with the recent warm weather. The options are to use dip or pour-on. The pour-on products are not effective against sheep-scab and most products are not effective against other parasites. (For the
pour-on products to be effective against lice and ticks, there is a different method of application.)

Ticks are a common problem in spring and early summer particularly on marginal land and hill areas. If you have not already treated for them, consider using an effective product now. Be careful to watch the withdrawal dates with lambs approaching slaughter. If using an injectable in the autumn to control sheep scab, you should consider dipping at least periodically to control the other external parasites. Pour-on products and sheep dip products available on the market are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

**Table 1. Pour-on products for prevention of blow fly attack**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product trade name</th>
<th>Active ingredient</th>
<th>How it works</th>
<th>Withdrawal period</th>
<th>Active period</th>
<th>Other parasites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vetrazin</td>
<td>Cryomazine 6%</td>
<td>Prevent</td>
<td>28 days</td>
<td>Up to 12 weeks</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young’s Vector, Ectofly; Ovisect</td>
<td>Cypermethrin 1.25%</td>
<td>Prevent and treat</td>
<td>7-8 days</td>
<td>6-8 weeks</td>
<td>Ticks, biting lice, head flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click</td>
<td>Dicyclanil 5%</td>
<td>Prevent</td>
<td>40 days</td>
<td>16 weeks</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clickzin</td>
<td>Dicyclanil 1.25%</td>
<td>Prevent</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Sheep dips for control and prevention of blow fly attack**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product trade name</th>
<th>Active ingredient</th>
<th>How it works</th>
<th>Withdrawal period</th>
<th>Active period</th>
<th>Other parasites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyperguard, Ecofleece</td>
<td>Cypermethrin 10%</td>
<td>Prevent and treat</td>
<td>14 days</td>
<td>5-8 weeks</td>
<td>Ticks, lice, keds and scab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ectoflits, Osmonds Goldfleece</td>
<td>Dimpylate 60% (Diazinon)</td>
<td>Prevent and treat</td>
<td>35 days</td>
<td>5-8 weeks</td>
<td>Lice, keds and scab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer dip</td>
<td>Dimpylate 10% (Diazinon)</td>
<td>Prevent and treat</td>
<td>35 days</td>
<td>5-8 weeks</td>
<td>Sheep scab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges to performance

Philip Creighton, reports from the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm at the Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co Galway.

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 three-to-four 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 from 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 30kg K/ha in early May based on soil fertility analysis.

Lamb performance measured at nine 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.