Grassland management

Grass growth starts to tail off in September and this is an important time to start planning your autumn/winter rotation to ensure that fields are grazed off in the correct order. Fields being targeted for early spring grass need to be closed in October, so ensure that these are completely grazed out by your intended closing date. Chemical nitrogen (N) and phosphorous (P) can still be applied to grazing ground up to September 15. Target the fields that will give the best response, i.e., silage aftermaths, reseeded ground and fields with a high proportion of perennial ryegrass. It is important not to delay spreading fertiliser, as every day delayed will reduce the response that is achieved.

Lamb performance

During September, lamb growth rates on grass-only swards will struggle to break 1kg liveweight per week. Lambs that are a long way behind target may need some meal supplementation. Approximately 0.3kg-0.6kg per head per week appears to be the optimum level depending on grass quantity and quality. Separate ram lambs from ewe lambs to prevent the rams mating, and expending their energy chasing ewe lambs and fighting.
Preventing for the mating season

**Ewes**
At this stage ewes should have been grouped and fed according to body condition. The target body condition score (BCS) for ewes at mating time is 3.0+. Work from the BETTER farms shows that ewes in higher BCS have more lambs. Therefore, if it has not already been done, it is essential that thin ewes are preferentially fed at this stage. Thin ewes that have not responded in terms of improving body condition after several weeks of preferential treatment should be culled and not mated, as these are likely to cause problems at, or post, lambing.

**Rams**
Active rams will eat very little during the mating season and will lose up to 15% of their body weight. Therefore, having rams in adequate body condition (BCS 4+) is important. It takes time to put on body condition, so at this stage rams that are thin may need supplementary feeding to ensure that they achieve target body condition at mating. Guard against infertility. Any infection that raises a ram’s body temperature above 104°F (40°C) is likely to result in infertility for six to seven weeks post infection. Applying raddle to the rams and changing the colour every 14 days is the only sure way to identify problems before it is too late.

**Health & Safety**

Farm safety village at the Ploughing

During the first six months of 2015 there were eight farm workplace deaths compared to 15 for the same period in 2014. However, during the second half of 2014, a further 15 deaths took place. The message is clear: farm safety needs year-long attention; target zero farm accidents for your farm. A major farm safety village exhibit will take place at the Ploughing Championships. This will be a ‘one stop shop’ for farm health and safety, including machinery safety health checking, a new childhood safety exhibit and guidance on bale stacking. Information on the new TAMS schemes as regards grant aid and training will also be available.
Trace element supplementation – results from Athenry

By Dr Tim Keady and Noel McNamara, Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway, and Seamus Fagan, Regional Veterinary Laboratory, DAFM, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

A study was undertaken recently at the Athenry Research Centre to evaluate the effects of supplementation with cobalt, either alone or in combination with vitamin B12 and selenium, on lamb performance post weaning.

Results are presented in Table 1. During the first seven weeks of the study, trace element supplementation had no effect on daily liveweight gain. However, as the grazing season progressed supplementation with cobalt, offered either alone or in combination with vitamin B12 and selenium, increased lamb weight gain. Consequently, trace element supplementation increased lamb drafting weight and carcass weight by 1.75kg and 1.35kg, respectively. It is notable from these results that there was no benefit to including vitamin B12 and selenium with cobalt in the drench under conditions at the Athenry farm.

Blood samples showed that lambs on all treatments were in the normal range for blood copper, selenium and GSHPX (glutathione peroxide).

As cobalt is stored in the liver in the form of vitamin B12, the best indicator for cobalt status is liver cobalt concentration (Table 1). Lambs that did not receive any supplementation had a lower concentration of cobalt in the liver, being below the normal range.

Conclusions

1. At Athenry, supplementation with cobalt increased lamb performance.
2. The benefit to supplementation was greater later in the season.
3. At Athenry, including vitamin B12 and selenium with cobalt did not significantly increase lamb performance relative to the cobalt only treatment.

Table 1. Effect of trace element supplementation on lamb performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Cobalt</th>
<th>Cobalt + B12 + selenium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liveweight gain (g/day)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– July 12 to August 26</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– August 26 to September 23</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– September 23 to November 4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– November 4 to December 16</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight at drafting (kg)</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carcass weight (kg)</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver cobalt (µmol/l)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Keady, Fagan and Hanrahan, 2015a)
Drafting of lambs continues. On a stocking rate basis, 34% of lambs have been drafted from low stocking rate (10 ewes/ha) groups, with 27% from the medium (12 ewes/ha) and 20% from the high stocking rate (14 ewes/ha) groups up to mid August. Prolificacy levels are not having a big effect, with even numbers of lambs drafted from each group so far. Average liveweight for lambs drafted to date (August 14) was 44.5kg, with average carcass weight 19.7kg. This represents an average kill out rate of 44%. Lamb growth rates for the past month have been in the region of 180 to 145g/day. Attention is starting to turn to preparing the flocks for mating. A final check of ewes will be completed in mid-August and replacements added to the groups once any remaining culls are removed. Rams and ewes are being footbathed at regular intervals and any problem cases being dealt with.

Grass growth rates are averaging 40-60kg DM/ha/day. This is allowing covers to begin to build as we go into the autumn. Nitrogen application rates are currently between 11, 17 and 25kg/ha (1/3, 1/2, 3/4 bag CAN/ac) for the low, medium and high stocking rates, respectively. A final application of between 17 and 25kg N/ha (depending on stocking rate) will be applied in mid-September to continue building covers for the autumn. Maintenance dressings of potassium (K) are also being applied.

Average liveweight for lambs drafted to date (August 14) was 44.5kg, with an average carcass weight of 19.7kg. This represents an average kill out rate of 44%.

For further information on any issues raised in this newsletter, or to access other enterprise newsletters, please contact your local Teagasc adviser or see www.teagasc.ie.