Grassland management

Growth stayed strong during August, averaging 57kg DM/ha/day on BETTER sheep farms. But growth will slow during September and it’s important to take stock of grass supplies on the farm. The target in early September is to have 20 days grazing ahead of the flock, increasing to 30 days by early October to bank up grass supplies for the end of the grazing season. Growth during this period will be influenced by previous fertiliser application, so pasture that hasn’t received any during August may be found to be unresponsive and have lower growth potential. Chemical fertiliser can be applied before September 15. This should be targeted firstly at recently reseeded ground or on silage aftermath. Delaying application will reduce the response to fertiliser input with better responses achieved earlier in the month.

Lamb performance

Lamb growth rate achieved from a grass-only diet on commercial farms during early September is typically 150g/day. To maintain performance, lambs need access to the best available pasture and to be kept moving ahead of the rest of the flock. Depending on the weight of your remaining lambs and the available grass supply, it may be necessary to introduce a concentrate supplement. Best economic responses are achieved from allocations of 300-600g/day/lamb. One of the other key factors influencing lamb performance in the autumn is parasite challenge. Using an effective product is vital. The research update on worms in this issue shows that a lot of farms are using ineffective products to control parasites. Do you know the status of your flock? If not, you should consider contacting your local laboratory to arrange a drench test. Details of laboratories providing this service can be obtained from your local adviser.
**Preparing for the breeding season**

Getting the ewe flock in good condition, i.e., each with a body condition score of 3.5, before joining will have an impact on flock management during the winter and overall output next season. Continuous assessment of ewes every two to three weeks prior to joining will provide an opportunity to identify and rectify any issues before joining. Thin ewes or those that lambed at one-year-old should get preferential treatment. Lame ewes should be segregated from the flock and treated appropriately. A health check should then be performed to see if they should be put in with the remaining problem ewes for joining or drafted for culling.

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**RESEARCH UPDATE**

**Which wormer performs best?**

Orla Keane and Barbara Good of AGRIC, Teagasc, Grange and AGRIC, Teagasc, Athenry report on the extent of drench failure in Irish sheep flocks.

While there are many non-prescription wormers on the market, they all belong to one of three classes: benzimidazole (1-BZ, white group); levamisole (2-LV, yellow group); or, macrocyclic lactone (3-ML, clear group). In recent years there have been reports of anthelmintic/wormer resistance. When worms become resistant to the wormer, they are capable of surviving doses of anthelmintic drugs that would normally kill them. As part of the sheep technology adoption programme (STAP) run by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) between 2013 and 2015, farmers had the option of completing a task to test the efficacy of their anthelmintic treatment. Researchers at Teagasc analysed the results of 1,441 drench efficacy tests.

The 1-BZ and 3-ML classes were the most popular anthelmintics tested with 550 and 575 tests using these products, respectively. Only 316 farmers tested a 2-LV product. Overall, only 51% of the anthelmintic treatments administered were effective (they reduced the faecal egg count by more than 95%). All products were highly effective against *Nematodirus spp*. The results of the efficacy tests describing a reduction in ‘other roundworms’ excluding *Nematodirus spp* are shown in **Figure 1**. There was a significant difference among the anthelmintic classes with 1-BZ the least effective and 3-ML the most effective. There was no effect of the year of the test (2013-2015), the month of the test (June-September) or the geographical region on anthelmintic efficacy observed. Almost half of the anthelmintic treatments administered by producers to their lambs were not effective at killing all the worms and evidence suggests that anthelmintic resistance is likely to be responsible in the majority of cases. It is important that lamb producers are aware of what anthelmintics work on their farm and implement a sustainable worm control strategy, including robust biosecurity procedures to prevent buying in sheep that are carrying anthelmintic-resistant worms.

![Figure 1: Percentage of anthelmintic efficacy tests that were effective (black) or not effective (red) for the anthelmintic classes 1-BZ (white), 2-LV (yellow) and 3-ML (clear).](image-url)
Breeding season nears

Frank Campion of AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the preparation for the breeding season on the BETTER sheep farms.

Attention on the BETTER sheep farms is turning to the breeding season with the selection of replacement ewes and rams top of the agenda. As with previous years, the lowland flocks will carry out single sire mating on a proportion of the ewes so that the parentage of some can be identified. This data will then be fed back to Sheep Ireland and used to evaluate the current breeding indexes. Replacement ewes are selected based on the lambs’ breed and the breeding policy in place on the farm. Consideration will also be given to the lambs’ growth rate to seven weeks of age to try and select replacements from the ewes with the highest milk production ability.

Four of the lowland flocks will breed their replacements as ewe lambs, with the target of all ewe lambs put to the ram being at least 45kg live weight and having a condition score of 3.5 or greater. The suitability of ewes currently in the flock for breeding is being assessed across the farms. Thin ewes will be selected out and given preferential access to grass over other ewes, in order to try and build their condition score prior to joining. Drafting of lambs for slaughter continues with drafting rates varying across the flocks. Remaining lambs are still being given access to high-quality grass first, with target residency periods of three to four days. As lamb numbers drop, this is freeing up grass to prepare ewes for joining. Grass growth rates have declined over the past two to three weeks (Figure 2) and target days ahead are being extended to 20 days from the start of September. At present, most farms have a surplus of grass but this will change quickly as growth rates drop off. Autumn grazing plans are being worked out on the farms with an aim to be closing paddocks in rotation from 120 days prior to the start of turn out next spring.

Upcoming events

Approved knowledge transfer national events

September 6: BETTER Farm sheep event on the farm of James Lally, Durless, Kilsallagh, Westport, Co. Mayo. Starts at 6.00pm.

September 7: Upland vegetation management event, Laragh, Co. Wicklow. Starts at 10.30am.
Drafting continues as attention turns to mating

Philip Creighton of AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lamb drafting at the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

Drafting of lambs continues. On a stocking rate basis, 37% of lambs have been drafted from low stocking rate (10 ewes/ha) groups, 25% from the medium (12 ewes/ha) and 19% from 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 (~27%).

Average live weight for lambs drafted to date (August 19) was 44.4kg with average carcass weight 19.6kg. This represents an average kill out percentage of 44%. Kill out over the last month has been quite variable with kill out percentages as low as 42% recorded.

Lamb growth rates for the past month have been in the region of 167-188g/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 are being dealt with. Grass growth rates have remained very strong, averaging 70-80kg DM/ha/day. This allowed us to take out a block for reseeding in early August. We will have to remove a few more strong paddocks for bales as soon as the weather allows and we will then start building covers for the autumn. A final application of between 17 and 25kg N/ha (depending on stocking rate) will be applied in mid September. Maintenance dressings of potassium (K) are also being applied based on soil test results.

Tidy up and secure loads before winter

Slips, trips and falls are the cause of the highest level of non-fatal farm accidents. These lead to serious accidents, disability and death. The principal causes are untidy workplaces and rushing. September is an opportune month to tidy up walkways and secure loads before the winter season sets in.

As there is a seven times higher risk of death from a fall at height than at ground level, particular precautions are needed here. A newly released FBD-sponsored booklet ‘Build in Safety – An Advisory Booklet for Farmers’, and a leaflet explaining the health and safety training requirements for the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS) will be available at the Teagasc exhibit at the National Ploughing Championships and in Teagasc offices.

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.