

**Farm of
Brian Nicholson
Johnstown,
Co. Kilkenny**



**This is a DAFM approved Knowledge Transfer
Sheep Event**



Ireland's EU Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014 - 2020
Co-Funded by the Irish Government and the European Union



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Europe
(investing in rural areas)



Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
An tAire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara

Introduction

We welcome you to today's event where you will hear about the on-going changes on Brian Nicholson's farm as part of his involvement in the Sheep BETTER farm Programme. Brian operates a sheep farm, lambing over 1000 ewes/ewe lambs. The farm also supports a dairy heifer contract rearing enterprise from June to September/October. The changes implemented on the farm since Brian joined the BETTER farm sheep programme in 2012 have improved the efficiency and output from the flock as you will hear in more detail today.

There are 4 stands covering:

- Farm layout, farm plan and flock performance
- Flock breeding
- Grazing infrastructure and grassland management
- Lamb performance

Each of these stands will provide you with an opportunity to engage with the speakers on a variety of topics, which we strongly encourage you to do. This is a national qualifying event for the Knowledge Transfer Programme (Year 1) and we would encourage participants to ensure they register with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at the event.

Finally, we would like to thank the Nicholson family for their continued participation in the Sheep BETTER farm programme and opening their farm today.

Farm details

- 96 ha (237 acres)
- 2 main blocks (divided by road)
- **Farm system**
 - 1125 ewes (including replacements)
 - Mid-season lamb production
 - Lambing from 20th February onwards in 4 batches
 - 60 dairy heifers + 1 bull grazed with sheep for most of the grazing season (contract rearing enterprise)
 - 5.3 ha of seed oats
 - 3.6 ha of Redstart sown for finishing lambs
- Flock is part of the Sheep Ireland CPT programme
- Sheep system yielded a gross margin of €869 per hectare in 2016

Farm Plan

Focused on 3 key areas to improve profitability:

1. Breeding policy

- Closed flock
- Develop a maternal/terminal reciprocal cross
- Improve breeding management of ewe lambs

2. Grassland management

- Address soil fertility issues
- Increase grazing divisions
- Implement a reseeding plan

3. Flock management

- Improve handling facilities
- Address sheep housing issues
- Reduced emphasis on creep feeding of lambs

Sheep System

Ewe breed: Belclare X Texel

System management:

Mature ewe flock

- Lambled from 20th of February onwards in 3 batches
- Belclare and Texel rams used for replacements
- No supplementation offered during main part of grazing season
- Managed in mobs of 250 ewes + lambs
- Target is to finish as many lambs as possible off grass only

Yearlings ewes

- Lambled from 1st of March onwards
- Charollais, Vendeen and Ile de France rams used
- Target minimum live weight of 45kg live weight at mating time
- Managed as separate group until weaning
- Ewes supplemented for first 4 weeks after lambing
- Lambs supplemented at grass in previous years, not done in 2017

Artificially reared lambs

- Lamb feeder used 'EWE 2'
- Target 12.5 – 13.5 kg milk powder per lamb
- Lambs split on basis of age
- Weaned once consuming 250g/day concentrates for 3 consecutive days (approx. 5 to 7 weeks)
- Turned out to on grass from weaning

Flock Performance

Table 1. Mid-season Mature Ewe Flock Productivity in 2012 and 2017

Year	Year 1	Current
	2012	2017
No of ewes joined	474	822
Ewes lambbed (%)	94	90
Litter size	1.96	1.98
Lambs reared per ewe joined	1.66	1.54
Lambs Reared	787	1263

Table 2. Lamb performance to weaning 2016/17 season for the lambs from the mature ewe flock

Birth Type	Birth Weight (kg)	7 Week Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)
1	5.6	23.4	34.3
2	4.6	19.9	31.8
3+	3.9	18.9	29.7

Table 3. Lamb performance to weaning 2016/17 season for the lambs from the yearling ewe flock

Birth Type	Birth Weight (kg)	7 Week Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)
1	4.9	21.2	32.3
2	3.7	16.0	24.9
3	3.2	13.3	23.4

Cattle System

- 60 dairy heifers + 1 bull arrived in June
- Graze with the sheep until autumn when grass supply becomes limited to what is required for the sheep only
- Heifers returned to dairy farm once finished grazing and a new batch arrives the following year

Grassland

Cumulative Paddock Yield to 31/12/2016

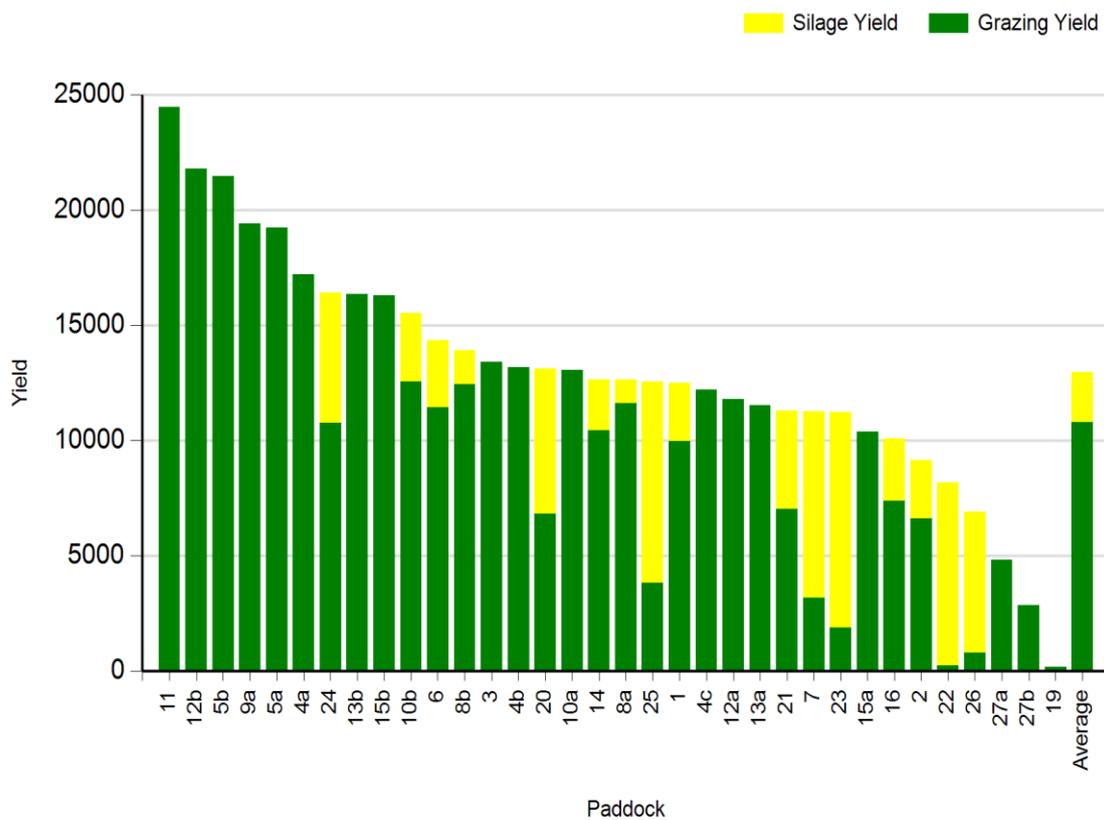


Figure 1. Cumulative paddock yield from 2016 on Nicholson's farm

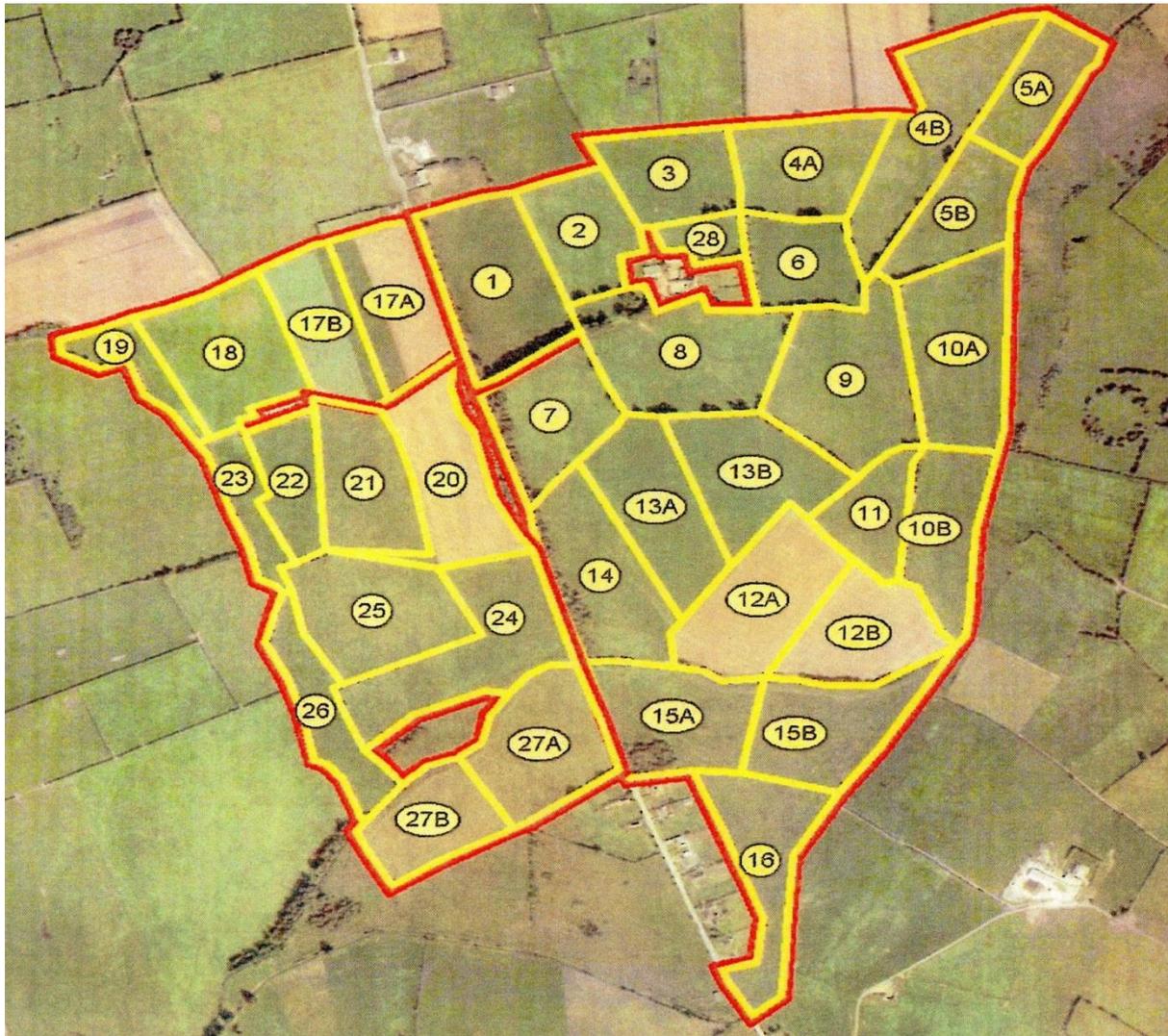


Figure 2. Farm map for Nicholson's farm

- Increased number of permanent divisions to 38 from 12 in 2012
- Utilised TAMS
- Temporary divisions achieved with use of Electric Fencing
 - 3 Strands of poly wire
- Grew 13 tonne grass DM per hectare in 2016
- Reseeding being carried out on a rotational basis each year
- 110 kg of N spread per ha across the farm in 2016
- 87 kg of N spread per ha so far in 2017

Notes