



SHEEP

February 2018

Grassland management

February is the month to start spreading fertiliser to boost spring grass growth. Spread 25kg of urea per acre once ground conditions allow, which should be sufficient to help

kick-start grass growth. Urea is a lot cheaper than other nitrogen (N) sources and should be used except where lime has been spread in the last three to four months.

Clean Livestock Policy

The winter months are the most challenging in terms of being able to present clean livestock for slaughter. As food producers, there is an onus on sheep farmers to take steps to improve the cleanliness of sheep

being sent to slaughter. A guide to help sheep producers to present cleaner sheep can be downloaded at: www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2017/Clean-Livestock-Policy-for-Sheep-Producers-Guide.pdf.

Flock health

Pre-lambing clostridial and pasteurella booster vaccinations should be given four to six weeks pre lambing. Don't forget to vaccinate rams and replacements that are not in lamb to keep them covered.

There is no benefit in treating ewes for worms at lambing time if faecal egg counts are not subsequently used

to determine when lambs will need to be treated. Furthermore, using a wormer that is not more than 95% effective at killing the worms in the ewes will only speed up the development of worms that are resistant to that wormer on your farm. This resistance is permanent and irreversible.

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Knowledge Transfer

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- Flock health
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- Two research updates
- BETTER Farm update

Prepare for lambing

As ewes get closer to lambing they get larger and more vulnerable. Ensure that you have enough trough space. There should be 60cm (2ft) for big ewes (80kg+) (Suffolk and Texel cross, etc.) and 45cm (1.5ft) for medium-sized ewes (70-75kg). Keep an eye on ewe body condition. If ewes are

losing condition, then you need to increase feeding levels. Ensuring that ewes lamb down in good body condition improves lamb survival rates. Do a shopping list of all the items you need for lambing time. Having these purchased before lambing starts is good practice.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Preparation for a new year

Fiona McGovern, AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway looks forward to the year ahead for the INZAC Flock in Athenry.

All INZAC ewes were pregnancy scanned in early January to assist pre-lambing management decisions. Preliminary results show an overall pregnancy rate to first service of 84%. Scan rates of 1.51 lambs per ewe were recorded for Irish low-genetic merit ewes who were joined to the ram, 1.70 lambs per ewe for Irish high-genetic merit ewes joined, and 1.82 lambs per ewe for the New Zealand ewes joined. Immediately after scanning, all ewes were weighed and body condition score (BCS) was taken before they were penned according to scanned litter size and lambing date. Overall, ewes are averaging 75kg liveweight. More importantly, BCS is good, with averages of 3.45, 3.35 and 3.22 for the low, high and New Zealand ewes, respectively. All ewes are offered grass silage (80% DMD) with concentrate

supplementation as shown in **Table 1**. The pre-lambing clostridia booster will be administered in early February, ahead of a lambing start date of March 1.

Soil samples were collected from all paddocks in mid January and we are currently awaiting results from these, which will be used as a guide to fertiliser planning for the year ahead. Grass covers are building, with the first paddocks due for grazing in early March having a current cover of ~800-900kg DM/ha (6-7cm). N in the form of urea will be blanket spread on all farmlets at a rate of 23 units/ac (half bag) in early to mid February to help boost grass covers prior to turnout in March. Once soil temperatures are above 6-7 degrees, grass growth will occur and a response will be obtained.

Table 1: Concentrate allowances for ewes pre lambing.

	Weeks pre lambing				Total
	8-7	6-5	4-3	2-1	
	Concentrates (kg/ewe/day)				
Singles	-	-	0.3	0.3	8.4
Twins	-	0.30	0.55	0.55	19.6
Triplets	0.30	0.55	0.55	0.75	30.1



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Lambing already underway

Frank Campion of AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how the sheep on the BETTER sheep farms have been faring so far in 2018.

Early lambing flock

At the time of writing, over 90% of the ewes in the early lambing flock in Co. Wexford have lambed. However, weather conditions are making it very difficult to get ewes and lambs out to grass. Once the weather allows, ewes will be turned out to sheltered paddocks closed up since early to mid October. Ewes will be supplemented with 0.5kg of meal for the first couple of weeks at grass. Creep feed will be introduced to the lambs seven to 14 days after turnout. Lambs were weighed at birth and will be weighed again at weaning when they are approximately eight weeks of age.

The midseason flocks' ewes were scanned in late December/January and a summary of the results is

presented in **Table 2**. Scanned litter size this year is similar to last year on average for the flocks. Ewes have now been penned by litter size and where possible, divided by raddle marks within litter size. Yearling ewes and the hill flocks will be scanned over the coming weeks and there will be an update in the next newsletter.

Time to start thinking about grass again!

All the farms are measuring opening grass covers in late January/early February in order to assess what grass is in place prior to lambing commencing. Once weather conditions allow, the opening round of fertiliser will also be applied early this month.

Table 2: Mature ewe scanning results from lowland BETTER farms 2017/18.

Farm Location	O'Leary Kerry	McLaughlin Donegal	Kearney Louth	O'Connell Leitrim	Doyle Wexford	Prendergast Mayo	Gonley Sligo	Dunne Wicklow
Scanned litter size	2.12	1.96	2.21	2.00	1.94	1.92	1.80	1.75
Scanned pregnancy rate	97.1	97.1	95.2	94.8	98.2	98.2	92.8	97.4
Scanning rate	2.06	1.90	2.11	1.89	1.91	1.88	1.67	1.70

Upcoming events

Teagasc Hill Sheep Conference

Wednesday February 21, Knockranny House Hotel, Westport, Co. Mayo.

Knowledge transfer sign-in from 5.30pm, conference starts at 6.00pm.

Grass10 spring grass walks (all start at 2.00pm)

Kilkenny – February 7 – Rory O'Donnell, Clashwilliam, Gowran

Meath – February 9 – Tom McGuinness, Bellewstown, Trim

Limerick – February 14 – Pallaskerry Agricultural College

Galway – February 20 – John and Patrick O'Shaughnessy, Castlevew, Mirah,

Turloughmore

Donegal – February 23 – Tommy McLaughlin, Ballygorman, Malin Head



Nutrition during late pregnancy

Dr Tim Keady, Teagasc, Athenry Research Centre, Co. Galway looks at providing ewes with the right nutrition for them and their lambs.

Management of the ewe during late pregnancy impacts on lamb weight and vigour at birth, as well as colostrum production by the ewe, all of which influence labour requirement around lambing and flock profitability. Each additional 0.1 lamb reared per ewe joined is worth approximately €10/ewe.

Level of concentrate to offer

The concentrate requirement of ewes during late pregnancy is influenced by silage feed value. Silage DMD is the main factor influencing feed value. It is assumed that the silage is being offered using good feeding management, i.e., ewes have access to fresh silage 24 hours daily and that any silage residue is removed twice weekly. The effects of silage feed value on the concentrate requirement of twin-bearing ewes in late pregnancy are presented in **Table 3**. For example, for silages at 79 and 64% DMD, an additional 3kg and 10kg concentrate, respectively, are required for long-chop silages, compared to precision chop silages, respectively. The concentrate requirements per ewe presented in **Table 3** can be reduced by 5kg in the case of single-bearing ewes, while concentrate supplementation should be increased by 8kg for ewes carrying triplets.

The ingredient composition of the concentrate that I formulated for the ewes during late pregnancy at Athenry is presented in **Table 4**.

The concentrate was formulated to contain 19%

protein, using good protein (soya, rapeseed), energy (maize, barley) and fibre (beet pulp, soya hulls) sources. Soyabean meal should form the main protein source for concentrates offered to ewes during late pregnancy. When offering similar levels of concentrate to ewes during late pregnancy as is offered at Athenry, a reduction in concentrate price of €20/t equates to a saving equivalent of only 44 cent per ewe. Therefore, when purchasing a concentrate it is very important to be aware of its ingredient composition, rather than basing the decision solely on price.

Table 3: Effects of silage quality on total concentrate requirements (kg) of twin-bearing ewes during late pregnancy.

	Silage DMD (%)		
Type of silage	79	72	64
Precision chopped	10	17	25
Big bale/single chop	13	24	35

Table 4: Ingredient composition of the concentrate that will be offered to ewes at Athenry this year.

Ingredient	kg/t
Soyabean meal	200
Maize meal	200
Barley	160
Soya hulls	145
Beet pulp	100
Rapeseed	80
Maize distillers	40
Molasses	50
Minerals and vitamins	25