



# SHEEP

June 2018

## Grass growth improves

Grass growth has picked up significantly during May and many farms can move onto dealing with a surplus – hopefully this continues. We can see from the growth rates presented in the BETTER Farm Update, that growth has kicked on in the latter half of May. The turnaround is a welcome change and puts most farms into a surplus situation. Aim for pre-grazing yields of 1,250-1,500kg DM/ha (7-9cm). The target for June is to maintain 10 days grazing ahead of the flock. Keep in mind this is a period of high growth, so it is advisable to assess the grass availability on the grazing area on a weekly basis. When covers exceed 2,000kg DM/ha (10cm plus) consider

dropping out for silage. This year with late closing of silage ground, any and all surplus bales will be needed to replenish reserves. Don't be afraid to take lighter cuts off grazing paddocks as it will provide high-quality silage. It will also allow paddocks to return into the rotation at or soon after weaning. A guideline of a further 12-18kg per hectare (10-15 units/acre) of fertiliser should be applied during June. Those who are hoping to cut additional grazing areas should increase this and take advantage of the good growing conditions. Remember to target areas cut for bales with compound fertilisers or slurry where available to replenish nutrients.

Edited by  
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## Weaning

With the improvements in grass growth there will be a temptation to delay weaning, as many will hope to compensate for lower lamb growth this spring or to get a couple of drafts away first.

Don't do this. As lambs approach weaning, their grass intake is increasing considerably and they begin competing with ewes.

Additionally, ewe milk yield will drop off substantially. Wean the lambs, prioritise grazing areas where appropriate and target supplementation if necessary. This spring took its toll on ewes with many in poorer condition.

Weaning lambs on time will give ewes ample time to put back on weight. It will also allow you to identify any culls on time and get them back in condition for selling earlier in the season.

## Grass10 sheep walks



As part of the Grass10 programme a further series of walks has been organised for early June. These events will focus on grazing management during the summer period. All events will start at 2.00pm sharp, and details of the locations are outlined below. All events will be signposted locally.

Farm details/venues as follows:

- June 1, Eddie Gavin, Fenniscourt, Bagenalstown, Co Carlow;
- June 7, Ken Matthews, Killeagh, Co. Offaly; and,
- June 8, Enda Finnegan, Ballyeaskin, Templeboy, Co. Sligo.

## Upcoming event

### SHEEP2018: Farm to Fork

This is a major sheep and food industry event taking place at Teagasc, Mellows Campus, Athenry on Saturday, July 7, 2018 from 10.00am-5:00pm showcasing all aspects of the industry. There will also be a major technical focus to the day, with a series of villages and technical workshops on the following areas:

- grassland;
- breeding;
- nutrition;
- flock health;
- hill sheep production;
- environment;
- industry and markets;
- health and safety;
- education;
- food village; and,
- heritage showcase.



There will also be a host of other attractions available for attendees on the day. The sheep breed societies will be holding various showing competitions and displays. There will be sheepdog training and sheep shearing demonstrations. In addition the event will also host the keenly contested young shepherd competition.

There will be an extensive range of companies showcasing their products from all sections of the industry. With an expanded food section this year, the event will truly be from farm to fork with a wide variety of food displays, local companies and cookery demonstrations.

Sheep 2018: Farm to Fork will be a great day out for the entire family and a must for anyone involved in the sheep industry.



RESEARCH UPDATE

### Good weather brings good growth

Fiona McGovern, AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how the improvement in weather has benefitted the INZAC flock.

Thankfully, good weather conditions in recent weeks have helped grass growth levels return to normal and boosted animal performance. Since my last update, we stopped offering supplementation to ewes once our grass growth rates matched our demand. For the first three weeks of May, growth rates have averaged 85kg DM/ha/day and reached a level of 140kg DM/ha/day.

This has enabled us to close 35% of our grazing platform for silage. In addition, we currently have an average farm cover of 600kg DM/ha and 10 days grazing ahead. All grazing paddocks are now being sub-divided into two sections for grazing and ewes and lambs are spending approximately

three or four days in each section. Lamb performance for the period 0-10 weeks is presented in **Table 1**. All lambs received a dose for coccidia and a dose for nematodirus. The latter was based on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) forecasts. Lamb faecal samples are currently being collected and analysed via the FECPAK technique to determine worm burden. Our dosing decisions throughout the summer will be based on routine FECPAK results, which I will include updates on. Lambs have also received their vaccinations for clostridia and pasturella, which was given at six weeks and the second dose at 10 weeks, following manufacturer instructions.

**Table 1: Lamb performance at 10 weeks.**

	NZ	Elite Irish	Irish low
Liveweight (kg)	27.6	26.5	26.4
Average daily gain (ADG) 0-10 weeks (g/day)	326	311	309



HEALTH & SAFETY

### Lead by example

On a recent visit to Ireland, Dr Barbara Lee, Director of the USA National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety emphasised the role of parents in preventing childhood farm accidents. Positive attitudes lead to identifying hazards for children, exercising judgement with task selection and providing safety supervision. Positive attitudes

also get transmitted to children and young people. In Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) ‘Farm Safety Code of Practice’ gives guidance on accident prevention to children and young people. This month we enclose a farm safety newsletter especially for children. Please distribute and use it within your farm household.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Heating up

Frank Campion, AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how the warming weather has led to an increase in grass growth on the BETTER sheep farms.

May brought some welcome heat and a surge in grass growth on the BETTER sheep farms. At the time of writing, collection of the seven-week weights on the flocks is ongoing. There is an early indication that despite the difficult spring conditions, lamb performance is reasonably good but there is a lot of variation in lamb weights within some flocks. This performance came at a cost, with most of the farmers being forced to feed meal for parts of the spring due to very poor grass growth and grazing conditions.

As presented in **Figure 1**, grass growth rates were very low up until mid April. However, since then growth rates have increased significantly and the major challenge at the moment on the farms is managing grass

growth and planning to ensure silage stocks get replenished. All the farms have now closed some paddocks for silage and in some cases cut paddocks that went too strong for grazing.

The lowland farmers began collecting lamb faecal samples for FECPAK analysis in mid May and will continue to do so throughout the year. Some farmers have had to give lambs a second dose for nematodirus and the early flock has also been dosed for trichostrongylus. Drafting of lambs in the early flock has gone well, with 60% of the lambs drafted by mid May.

Work on collecting the seven-week weights from the hill flocks will commence in the coming weeks. Lambing has finished on these farms now, with strong ewes and lambs gone back to the hill where possible.

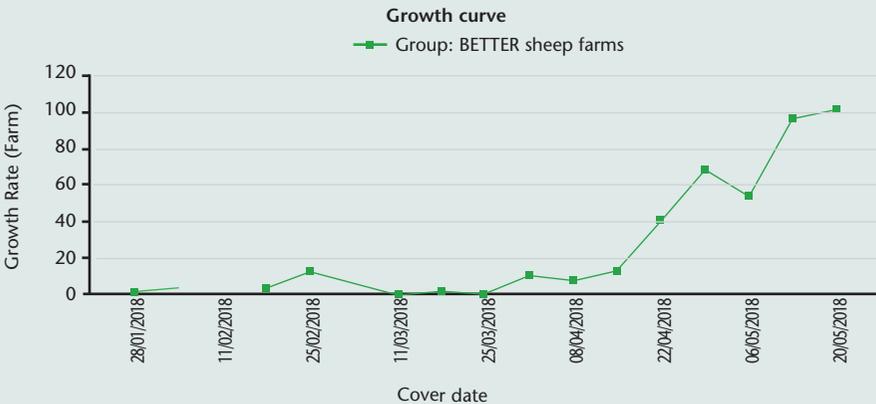


FIGURE 1: Grass growth curve for the BETTER sheep farms from January to May 2018.