

SHEEP

March 2018

Time to get some nitrogen out!

February has not been overly suitable for nitrogen (N) application. Applying half a bag of urea/acre (23 units N/acre) will increase grass supply on the farm. The days are getting longer and grass will respond well on average to N application. The benefit in grass supply is double the cost of this application. The flock's demand for grass will increase as more ewes lamb and as lambs mature.



Therefore, it is important to get grass moving on and stimulate the farm to grow. March is also an important month to put sheep in groups and start setting a grazing rotation. Paddocks/fields grazed in March must have a rest period to allow grass to build up for grazing from mid April onwards. A second application of N (23 units N/acre) should be considered at the end of March/early April to further increase grass supply.

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Parasite control

Teagasc has released a new publication, 'Products licensed for control of parasites in sheep in the Republic of Ireland', compiled by Dr Barbara Good, Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway. This will provide an invaluable reference document for the coming seasons. The new publication is available from Teagasc.ie website – search for parasite control.



Colostrum

Ensuring that newborn lambs receive adequate supplies of colostrum is crucial. Firstly, it provides a dense source of energy and nutrients. Secondly, it acts as a source of maternally derived antibodies that provide the lambs with passive immunity. Lastly, it acts as a laxative to help clean the digestive tract. The standard recommendation is that lambs receive 50ml per kg within the first six hours of life, and 200ml per kg within the first 24 hours of life. A guideline amount for lambs is summarised in **Table 1**. The birth weights are a guide to what the average might be for each birth type. Where ewes have insufficient colostrum an alternative needs to be sought. There are a number of artificial colostrum products on the



market. Cow colostrum is another alternative; however, it is recommended to mix it from a number of cows to avoid anaemia. In addition, cow colostrum should be supplemented at a higher rate (30% more) than recommended sheep levels. Even when doing this, always try to ensure that each lamb receives some of its own mother's colostrum to facilitate transfer of passive immunity.

Table 1: Colostrum feeding rates for newborn lambs.

Birth type	Birth weight (kg)	First feed	First 24 hours
Single	6	300ml	1,200ml
Twin	5	250ml	1,000ml
Triplet	4	200ml	800ml

Flock biosecurity

Purchasing pet lambs to put on ewes or purchasing foster ewes to rear lambs may seem like a good idea at the time as it solves one problem, but you could actually create a much

worse one. Every animal that enters a flock can pose a potential risk; this risk is heightened during the lambing period where many of the infectious agents are spread. Remember that the health status of your flock is only as good as the worst flock you buy your sheep from.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Accidents cost time and much more

A just completed Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS) farm accident add-on survey has revealed that farm accidents have risen by 13% in the last five years. Accidents involved livestock (in 42% of cases), vehicles/machinery (25%), trips and falls (19%), and chainsaws/timber (7%). By farm enterprise, the highest level of accidents in the last

five years was in dairying (18%), followed by tillage (12%), sheep (11%) and cattle enterprises (8%). Almost all farm accidents (97%) required medical treatment and 83% led to loss of work time, with 30% leading to 30 days or more lost. March is one of the busiest work times on farms, keep safety to the fore.



Cover machine moving parts.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Flock update

Frank Campion, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway.

Hill flocks

Scanning for three of the hill flocks in the programme was completed during February, and the results are summarised in **Table 2**. Post scanning, ewes were split on the basis of litter size, with twin-bearing ewes drafted onto the lowland areas for most of the flocks. Ewe body condition score (BCS) appears to be very variable within the flocks, with farmers reporting more thin ewes than normal. These ewes will need to be carefully monitored and managed in the run-up to lambing time.

Midseason flocks

At the time of writing, all of the mid-season flocks have completed their clostridia vaccinations and farmers are stepping up the level of concentrates being offered to ewes as lambing approaches. The three flocks mating ewe lambs completed scanning these ewes during February, with results in line with last year (**Table 3**).

Wet weather conditions in January and February have made it difficult for these farms to get fertiliser out early as planned, with most still waiting to get fertiliser out in some areas of the farm. This has meant that some farmers have had to spread small, drier areas of the farm when ground conditions allowed in order to start getting fertiliser out.

Table 2: Ewe scanning results from the hill BETTER farms.

Farm	McLaughlin	Gonley	Dunne*
Location	Donegal	Sligo	Wicklow
Scanned litter size	1.33	1.35	1.29
Scanned pregnancy rate	88.9	95.0	89.5
Scanning rate	1.18	1.28	1.16

* Cheviots

Table 3: Yearling ewe scanning results on lowland BETTER farms.

Farm	O'Leary	O'Connell	Doyle
Location	Kerry	Leitrim	Wexford
Scanned litter size	1.60	1.66	1.53
Scanned pregnancy rate (%)	91.9	91.4	98.8
Scanning rate	1.47	1.5	1.51



Developments on the sheep research demonstration farm

Philip Creighton, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Atherny, Co. Galway.

Ewes were scanned in early January. Preliminary analysis shows an overall scan rate of 1.83. When broken down into medium (Suffolk x) and high (Belclare x) prolificacy potential ewes, the scan rates are 1.72 and 1.93, respectively. This is approximately 0.1 lower than our long-term average and is most likely linked to ewes going to the ram approximately 0.25 of a BCS lower than normal. Ewes are currently in good body condition, averaging 3.2 at scanning, and this has been maintained as measured in mid February when ewes were given their clostridial vaccination booster. Ewes are now being offered grass silage (73 DMD) and have been grouped according to scanned litter size and lambing date as predicted by raddle colour, which was changed weekly during



mating, and are being offered concentrates as shown in **Table 4**. Over winter grass growth rates have been low and are in the region of 2-3kg DM/ha/day. Nitrogen in the form of urea (23 units/ac) has yet to be applied (mid February) due to poor weather and ground conditions. The fertiliser is in the yard ready to go and will be spread as soon as conditions allow. The first paddocks closed now have covers of ~1,000kg/DM/ha (~7cm); however, overall farm cover is below target at approximately 550kg DM/ha or 18 days' grazing ahead of us. This is about 7-10 days' worth of grass behind where we would like to be. If grass growth does not improve we may need to consider supplementing the ewes for a period post lambing to stretch the lower grass reserves.

Table 4: Concentrates per ewe per day prior to lambing (kg/ewe/day).

	Weeks pre lambing				Total (kg)
	7	6-5	4-3	2-1	
	Concentrates (kg/ewe/day)				
Singles	-	0.1	0.3	0.6	15
Twins	-	0.35	0.55	0.8	24
Triplets	0.2	0.35	0.65	1.0	30