

SHEEP

May 2018

Actions for grassland

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We have just come through one of the most difficult springs in 20 years.

What a difference a year makes – 12 months ago we had too much grass on sheep farms and this year we have just come through one of the most difficult springs in 20 years. At this stage, most farmers need to grow as much grass as possible to help build up covers, get any remaining stock out and for silage to replenish winter feed reserves. While the weather has

been to blame for most of our woes this spring, there are steps that can be taken now to try and improve grass growth rates for the coming months. Key actions are:

1. Spread extra fertiliser. On wet soil types very little fertiliser has been spread due to wet conditions.
2. Apply lime on ground that has been identified as being below optimum pH.

3. Reduce the number of grazing groups by joining different groups on the farm. This will allow more paddocks/fields to be rested and accumulate more grass.
4. Graze tight during May to maintain grass

quality – if grass starts to go ahead, don't speed up your rotation to try and keep on top of it. Skip the heavy covers and take them out as baled silage instead.

Prevent parasites

The warmer weather from the middle of April will most likely trigger nematodirus hatches on ground grazed by sheep or calves last year. Treat lambs once signs of disease appear. Faecal egg counts are not a good indicator for nematodirus treatment in young lambs. Coccidia will most likely be more prevalent this year due to wet and mucky conditions favouring the spread of this parasite. Again faecal egg counts are not a good indicator for this and if lambs fail to dry



Treat lambs once signs of disease appear. up after nematodirus treatment, they should be treated for coccidia.

Cash flow

The horrendous spring has heaped lots of extra cost on farmers this year. If you are under

pressure financially, speak to your financial institutions about getting bridging finance.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Prevent slurry gassing

May is a highly active farming month, particularly machinery work, including silage harvesting and fertiliser and slurry spreading. Open slurry access points and manholes are a particular hazard at this time of the year. A total of 10% of all farm workplace deaths are due to slurry drowning or gassing. Make sure that all slurry danger access points are well guarded when in use. Prevent slurry gassing by picking a windy day for slurry agitation and handling, and never enter a tank which is a confined space.



Close slurry openings.

Watch for lameness

Apart from being an animal welfare issue, lameness also has a significantly negative effect on animal performance. Keep an eye on your lambs and footbath them with 10% zinc or copper sulphate (1kg per 10L of water) or 3% formalin (3L per 100L) as soon as possible after you identify the first few lame lambs. Don't wait until the lambs are very lame as it makes it harder to treat scalds. Lameness resulting from footrot or contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD)



Keep an eye on your lambs and footbath them as soon as possible after you identify the first few lame lambs.

will need antibiotic treatment (under vet advice) and separation of the infected animals to help eliminate the problem.

Basic farm payment

Reminder: the deadline for Basic Payment Scheme applications is May 15. Late application will incur penalties, so contact your adviser/consultant to

ensure that yours is completed correctly and on time. This is one of the most important jobs you will do in 2018.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Slowly returning to normal

Frank Campion, AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how the pickup in weather is helping the BETTER Farms recover from the awful spring.

At the time of writing, the exceptionally difficult spring is beginning to loosen its grip on both the lowland and hill BETTER sheep farms. Grass growth rates are returning to normal and average farm covers are slowly rising back to target levels. Most of the farms have been meal-feeding ewes, and in some cases lambs, since lambing in order to overcome shortages in grass and fodder supplies. Feeding rates are being reduced presently across the farms as grass supplies come back in line with demand. Lambs on the lowland farms were treated for nematodirus in late April using either a white (benzimidazole:

1-BZ) or yellow (levamisole: 2-LV) anthelmintic. Over the next two to three weeks all lambs will be weighed for their seven-week weight, which will give a good indication of how lamb performance has been affected by the difficult spring conditions.

The hill flocks are a long way through lambing at this time also. Ewe body condition score and feed/grass supplies still remain a problem but the pressure is starting to ease. Most of the farms are trying to return strong ewes and lambs to the hill as quickly as possible to relieve the pressure on in-bye/green ground for the rest of the flock.



Working through difficult conditions

Philip Creighton, AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lambing and grass growth on the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.



Our opening farm cover was below target at around 15 days ahead.

Lambing commenced on March 5 and finished on April 7. Mean lambing date for 2018 was March 15. Approximately 90% of the flocks lambed over the first 20 days. Birth weights for singles, twins and triplets averaged 6.3, 5.1 and 3.9kg respectively. Lamb mortality levels averaged 7% for the period birth to one week old. Lambing assistance was recorded, with 20% of ewes requiring some level of assistance – although about half of this was very minor. An average of 9% of lambs required help to suck or were fed additional artificial milk after birth, ranging from 5% for singles to 14% for triplets. Average ewe body condition score (BCS) going out to grass was 3.2. Weather conditions were very challenging at times and we did have to hold ewes and lambs in longer than normal, with some housed for up to a week post lambing. Grass growth rates have

averaged 8kg DM/ha/day for March (~50% below normal) and 22kg DM/ha/day for April (~15% below normal up to April 19). Our opening farm cover was below target at around 15 days ahead. As a result of this and the below normal grass growth in March and April, we had to supplement the ewes with 0.8kg conc/ewe/day for four weeks from mid March to mid April to ration out available grass, slow the rotation and give regrowth a chance. This also supported ewes during peak milk production so hopefully, it should have reduced body condition loss and maintained a reasonable level of lamb performance. Detailed results for ewe and lamb performance will be included in our next update. To date, a total of 57kg of nitrogen (N) has been applied per ha (46 units/ac), in late February and late March.