

SHEEP

July 2018

Graze swards fully

June and July are the months of the year when most grass plants flower, become stemmy and of lower nutritional value. Keep on top of grass for the month of July by using your dry ewes to graze out the swards properly. To maximise lamb performance allow the lambs to preferentially graze swards with a grass height of 6-8cm. Pastures with a high proportion of leaf can

be grazed lower than 6cm provided that the residency period is short. This will only happen where paddock or field size is correct (ideally 2.5 acres and maximum five acres per 150 lambs being grazed). Once lambs are moved out, it is essential that the swards are grazed out fully (4-4.5cm) or topped to maintain grass quality into August and September.

Weaning – let ewes regain condition

There is no benefit in leaving lambs suckling ewes for longer than 14 weeks. March lambing flocks should have their lambs weaned by now. This will provide time for the

ewes in the flock to regain body condition before the next breeding season. The size of next year's lamb crop will be influenced by the condition of your ewes at mating time.

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Select replacements

Weaning is the best time to select potential flock replacements. Try to identify ewe lambs that are well grown and where possible ones that have been reared as twins. This is where record keeping

comes in. If you are unable to identify twin born and reared ewe lambs then you need to put a plan in place to ensure you do not find yourself in the same position next year.

Lameness

July is an ideal time to tackle lameness in the ewe flock. What percentage of your sheep are lame? If it is more than 5%, then that's a problem. The following is a useful exercise to try and reduce the incidence of lameness.

1. Identify and separate lame sheep.
2. Identify the cause of lameness. If it's scald and footrot, continue to the next point, if it is contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), then you need to contact your vet for advice.
3. Stand the lame sheep in a footbath of 10% zinc or copper sulphate for as long as possible (ideally 20 minutes).
4. Treat badly affected sheep with antibiotics according to veterinary advice.
5. Keep infected sheep in a separate group, away from non-infected sheep, and repeat footbath every five days. Once cured, identify the sheep that were lame and return them to the healthy flock.
6. Any sheep that turns up with footrot on three or more occasions should be culled.
7. Avoid routine foot paring of sheep as this only spreads the disease. Sheep that need to have their feet trimmed should be carefully trimmed (trim sparingly) and the foot trimmer needs to be disinfected between feet and between sheep.
8. In flocks where there is a very high incidence of footrot, it may be beneficial to consider vaccination – speak to your vet.

Early lamb 2019

Easter Sunday 2019 falls on April 21. Lambs destined for this market need to be fit for slaughter around April 14. Aim to lamb ewes 14-16 weeks prior to the target sale date.

Upcoming events

Date	Time	Venue	Topics
SHEEP 2018			
Sat July 7	10.00am-5.00pm	Teagasc Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway	All things sheep
BETTER FARM WALKS			
Thurs July 26	2.00pm	Michael and John Prendergast, Hollymount, Roundfort, Co. Mayo	Breeding/grass /flock health
Thurs August 2	2.00pm	John Doyle, Ballinacoola, Ballindaggin, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford	Breeding/grass /flock health

Breeding rams

Now is the time to go through your breeding rams. By giving the rams a proper health check, you will be able to correct any problems before the next breeding season.

Identify rams that are thin as these need to put on condition, which will take time and feed.

Where rams are not responding to treatment for issues such as lameness, or not putting on condition despite being given extra feed, it is time to cull them.

The ram sales season starts in July. Despite the fact that most farmers will not need rams until October, it is still a good idea to purchase your replacement rams in July/August.

There are a number of reasons for this: better choice of rams; gives purchased rams time to acclimatise to your farm and a new diet; and, it allows you time to quarantine the ram to ensure that he is not going to introduce any disease to your flock.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Growth rates still affected

Philip Creighton reports from the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm at the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway.

Conditions have changed a lot since our last update. The much improved weather conditions in May and June resulted in grass growth rates increasing rapidly to average 84kg DM/ha/day in May and 62kg DM/ha/day in June (up to June 17). This allowed ground closed for silage to bulk up quickly and we were able to cut our main silage in late May in ideal conditions. We also have cut quite a lot of surplus grass from paddocks, so we now have our silage requirements for winter 2018/19 plus a reserve of about 15%. Lamb performance from birth to six weeks was back compared to our long term average as expected, with lambs in the 11 ewe/ha groups averaging 270g/day (-10%) and lambs in the 13 ewe/ha groups averaging 260g/day (-10%). Our most recent weights at 12 weeks of age show that the long-term effects of the lower early life performance are still being felt with lamb growth rates from birth to 12 weeks of age averaging 250g/day (-5%) in the 11

ewe/ha groups and 240g/day (-5%) in the 13 ewe/ha groups. This has not been helped by the very rapid grass growth in early June which made maintaining grass quality very challenging. While taking out as much surplus grass as we could to maintain quality, remaining grass still had more stem than we would like.

This was most likely due to increased stress levels resulting from the dry weather, and lamb performance for the two-week period in early June suffered as a result, dropping to 190g-200g/day.

Lambs on grass-clover treatments have on average a 10g/day higher growth rate. Fortnightly faecal egg counts commenced in mid-May with lambs receiving a worm dose in early June based on egg counts rising above or approaching 500 eggs/gram. Lambs have also been supplemented with cobalt fortnightly from eight weeks of age. Lambs will be weaned in late June at 14 weeks (100 days).



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Dry spell putting pressure on grass

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

Weaning of lambs on the lowland flocks is well underway. Most of the flocks are likely to have weaned by early July with lambs at approximately 14 weeks of age. The recent extended dry spell in some parts of the country is putting pressure on grass supplies, meaning weaning of lambs on time is of particular importance in order to give lambs preferential access to grass on the farms. Post-weaning lambs will get preferential access to high quality grass (target pre-grazing height of approximately 8cm) with the ewes used to follow behind the lambs to clean out paddocks to maintain grass quality. All of the farms have

first cut silage made at this stage and this has been supplemented with excess paddocks being cut also. As a result there will be plenty of high quality re-growths available to lambs after weaning. Some of the farms have begun selling lambs with those fit so far mainly being singles and pet lambs finished indoors. At the time of writing dosing for *Trichostrongylus* has begun on some of the farms as a result of FECPAK results. Recent dry conditions appear to be keeping parasite pressure low on some farms currently but this will need careful monitoring once the moisture levels in the ground increase.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Protect against sunlight

Farmers in the working age category (16-64 years old) have a cancer mortality that is three times higher than that of blue/white collar workers in Ireland. Factors associated with this heightened death level include exposure to sunlight, lifestyle factors (particularly smoking but also diet, exercise and weight), and contact with cancer-causing substances (e.g., chemicals, asbestos fibre, and burnt oil). Late presentation for treatment is also a major factor in excess cancer mortality among farmers. Protect yourself against sunlight and other cancer causes. Further information is available at www.cancer.ie.



Protect yourself against sunlight and other causes of cancer.