



# SHEEP

November 2018

## Keep your grass for spring

On most sheep farms approximately 30% of the grazing ground should be closed for the winter at this stage (mid-March lambing flocks). This is to ensure that you have grass for next year. Keep closing ground in the same rotation that you will be grazing it next spring. Don't be tempted to graze the regrowth in these swards. You will need that grass for the ewes in the springtime

when they will have lambs at foot. Current ground conditions are ideal for spreading lime. If you have fields that have a low pH, now is a great time to consider spreading some ground limestone. This gives a great return on investment by unlocking nitrogen (N) and phosphorous (P) in the soil and making it available to the grass for the next three to five years.

## Finishing lambs indoors

Consider housing any remaining lambs and finishing them indoors. This will leave the remaining grass available to feed the ewes during the mating/post-mating period. Only feed concentrates to lambs that have been formulated for lambs. This will avoid problems with issues such as urinary calculi and copper poisoning.



*Consider housing remaining lambs.*

Edited by  
**Michael Gottstein,**  
Head of Sheep  
Knowledge Transfer

### In this edition

- Keep your grass for spring
- Finishing lambs indoors
- Clean Livestock Policy
- Keep monitoring mating
- Early lambing flocks
- BETTER Farm update

## Clean Livestock Policy

Where lambs are housed it is important to maximise ventilation and prevent rain from getting into the building. Aim to keep the lambs as clean as possible by using adequate bedding and appropriate stocking densities in slatted floored sheds. Where lambs require remedial clipping prior to slaughter, the belly and neck area need to be clean or clipped.



*Aim to have lambs as clean as possible.*

## Keep monitoring mating

Keep monitoring the mating of the ewe flock. Just because rams appeared to be working at the start of mating does not necessarily mean they will continue to do so. Even if you did not raddle the rams at the beginning of mating, it is important that you apply raddle to the rams for the last two weeks of the mating period to ensure that there are not a lot of ewes coming back. If greater than 15% of ewes are mated in the last two weeks of a five- to six-week mating season then you may have a problem with infertility, etc.

When mating is finished, give your rams a complete health check and put them on a high plane of nutrition to recover lost body condition. Ram lambs in particular will benefit from a worm drench post mating. Rams are expensive, so take a few simple steps



*When mating is finished give your rams a complete health check.*

to make sure they are around again for next year's mating.

## Early lambing flocks

Ewes lambing in January need to be pregnancy scanned now. Monitor the body condition of ewes in late pregnancy and if they start to lose condition, increase feed levels.

It is not a good idea to allow ewes to lose body condition in late pregnancy as these are the reserves they need during early lactation.



## BETTER FARM UPDATE

### Building BCS before housing

Frank Campion of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry reports on ewe condition and mating on the BETTER Sheep farms.

All the lowland flocks are now well and truly into the mating season at this point. Farms breeding ewe lambs joined them near the end of October, a couple of weeks after introducing rams to the main flock. Across the flocks, ewe body condition score (BCS) for the most part has been within acceptable ranges (**Table 1**) but the difficult spring/summer has shown in

some flocks, particularly in younger ewes who lambed for the first time last spring. However, most of the farms are reporting that grass supplies for ewes are good and the aim is to try and build some BCS on the thinner ewes prior to housing. The focus for these farms now is to get paddocks grazed out and closed off to allow covers to build for next spring.

**Table 1: Average ewe liveweight and ewe BCS at mating for lowland BETTER sheep farms.**

Flock County	Kearney Louth	O'Leary Kerry	Prendergast Mayo	Doyle Wexford	McLaughlin Donegal	O'Connell Leitrim
Average ewe liveweight (kg)	85.3	74.1	73.6	72.3	64.9	73.4
Average ewe BCS	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.2

November brings about mating time for the hill flocks, with most of the farms introducing rams from November 4 until around November 12.

Flocks are gathering ewes at the time of writing and initial reports suggest that ewe condition is mixed but better than last year.



## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Be conscious of Weil's disease

This potentially fatal condition is contracted from material or watercourses contaminated by rat urine. Most commonly, humans are infected through cuts and wounds, especially to the hands. Infection results in fever, headache, vomiting and muscle pain. The condition can be confused with flu and, if untreated, can quickly escalate to cause jaundice, meningitis and kidney failure.

Precautions include control of rats, covering cuts and wounds with a waterproof bandage, and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) if you are handling material that might be contaminated. If you are unwell, seek medical care and let your doctor know about the possibility of Weil's disease.



*Rat urine causes Weil's disease.*



## RESEARCH UPDATE

## Keeping performance on track

Philip Creighton of AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the measures the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm implemented to sustain lamb and ewe performance.



*Lambs drafted to date have averaged 45.9kg liveweight, producing a 19.7kg carcass with kill out averaging 43%.*

Rams were turned out to ewes on October 10. Ewe body condition going to the ram averaged 3.3. Up to early October, approximately 70% of the lambs had been drafted. This is 10% behind our long-term average. Lambs drafted to date have averaged 45.9kg liveweight, producing a 19.7kg carcass with kill out averaging 43%. There is little difference between stocking rate and grass or grass-clover groups. A lot of the difference in performance observed between groups last year was

recorded during July and August and due to conditions this year, this has not materialised. Lamb performance and drafting pattern were particularly slow during late August and early September. We observed very high parasite levels during this period measured through our fortnightly faecal egg counts. There seemed to be a rapid and sustained increase in egg counts once significant levels of moisture returned following the dry period of July and early August. Lamb performance and drafting rates have improved in the last month with lambs gaining 180-200g/day from mid September to mid October. We introduced concentrate supplementation at a rate of 300g/hd/day from mid September due to the slower than normal drafting rate and low DM content of the grass to try and make up some of the ground lost in August. Grass growth rate has averaged 47kg DM/ha/day for September and early October. We currently have 37 days grass ahead of groups on average. Closing of paddocks commenced in mid October to build grass for next spring. The plan is to have approximately 20% of each farmlet closed on average by late October, 40% by mid November, 60% by late November and 80% by mid December, with the remainder by late December/early January. These targets will have to be adjusted upwards for the higher stocking rate groups.