

Sheep 2018 – the premier sheep event

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Sheep 2018 – Farm to Fork will be the biggest joint industry sheep event held in Ireland in 2018.

The event takes place at Teagasc, Mel-lows Campus, Athenry, Co Galway, on Saturday 7 July 2018.

Sheep 2018 is a continuation of the sheep events which are jointly run by Teagasc, the Department of Agri-culture, University College Dublin, Bord Bia, Sheep Ireland and the *Irish Farmers Journal*.

The last comparable event was held on the same site in 2015. This year, to celebrate the designation of Galway, West of Ireland 2018, European Re-gion of Gastronomy, Galway County Council will also be a partner for the event. Consequently, there will be a significant food element to this year's event, hence the title Sheep 2018 – Farm to Fork.

The event opens to the public at 10am and admission is free. It should be a great day for all sheep farmers and their families to attend.

What to expect

Technical aspect of event

There will be a series of villages and stands covering all aspects of sheep production.

Grassland Village

The Grassland Village will cover all aspects of grassland management through demonstrations, information boards, grass and grazing infrastruc-ture displays. Advisory and research staff will be on hand to discuss soil fertility, fencing options, reseeding and seed mixture selection, as well as grass measurement and budgeting.

Environment Village

The Environment Village will focus

on key aspects that affect our envi-ronment. Teagasc staff will discuss and demonstrate issues influencing water quality, rush management and the safe use of MCPA, as well as the requirements for the GLAS scheme and low-emission slurry spreading.

Hill Sheep Village

Hill sheep make up 25% of the nation-al ewe flock and play an important role in maintaining our upland habi-tats and supporting rural communi-ties. This year, this village will focus on key aspects of hill sheep manage-ment to optimise returns from hill sheep enterprises. In addition, there will be demonstrations and work-shops on breed types, ram selection and key messages from the BETTER farm programme. There will also be a workshop on finishing store lambs.

Flock Health Village

Expenditure on flock health is the second-biggest variable cost on sheep farms. Also, flock health issues have significant negative effects on animal performance. Together with industry vets, DAFM staff and Teagasc re-search and advisory staff, this village will feature a host of information stands, demonstrations and work-shops addressing key flock health issues such as:

- External parasites.
- Internal parasites.
- Infectious abortions.
- Lameness.
- Causes of sheep mortality.
- Vaccination and proper administra-tion of health products.

Breeding Village

As the event is taking place just a few weeks before the start of the annual ram sales season and the breeding season for early lambing flocks, there will be a big focus on all aspects of sheep breeding.

From a technical point of view, there will be a large number of displays and workshops targeted at



Teagasc Athenry staff preparing for the last comparable sheep open day.

helping farmers to identify important aspects of both ewes and rams that will affect reproductive performance and ultimately profit.

This village will also feature infor-mation and sheep displays of the New Zealand, Suffolk and Texel ewes that Teagasc imported a number of years ago.

Education Village

This village will contain a significant display of the education options for people interested in careers in agri-culture. The displays will be staffed by staff from Teagasc and from universities and institutes of tech-nology, who will be able to discuss the various options with interested parties. There will also be a number of workshops on skills and a young shepherd competition.

Health & Safety Village

Health and safety continues to be one of the major challenges facing the agricultural industry. This village will contain a number of infor-mation stands and demonstration-type events highlighting the risks and solutions available to people engaged in agri-culture, not only from a safety point

of view but also looking at health issues.

Nutrition Village

Animal nutrition is a key driver of performance and variable costs on sheep farms. This village will focus on all aspects of sheep nutrition and will demonstrate to attendees how animal performance can be maxim-ised.

Wool Village

Wool is often seen as a nuisance prod-uct on sheep farms, as the costs as-sociated with removing the wool may not be covered by the market value of the fleece. The wool village will focus on the uses of Irish wool, sheep-shearing demonstrations, as well as wool-processing displays, which will be of interest to both farmers and members of the non-farming public.

BETTER Farm programme

Participants in the Teagasc BETTER farm programme will be present throughout the various villages shar-ing their experiences and showcasing how they have improved output and profitability on their farms through focusing on small but relevant changes to their farm management systems.

Processors and marketing

As in previous sheep events, there will be a significant focus on process-ing and marketing of both sheepmeat and live animals. Bord Bia will be co-ordinating factory displays of retail product and processors will have staff on hand to discuss market specifications and outlook.

Producer groups will be invited to display their wares and discuss with farmers and members of the public their marketing strategies or niches and the mechanics of operating these groups.

Teagasc and industry staff will be on hand to discuss topical and important information around areas such as:

- Clean Livestock Policy.
- Selecting lambs for slaughter.
- Tagging and recording require-ments.

Sheep breed shows and displays

Planned for 18 April in conjunction with Sheep Ireland meeting. Similar to previous events, there will be a big focus on sheep breed displays and a number of societies are planning to have sheep shows taking place at Sheep 2018.

Food aspect of the event

This year, to tie in with Galway, West

of Ireland 2018, European Region of Gastronomy designation, there will be a significant emphasis on all aspects of food. This designation fo-cuses attention on the vital role of the food industry in the west of Ireland and how central it is to the economic wellbeing of the area.

The award also presents the region with a European platform to not only showcase Galway and its surrounding area and the wonderful food pro-duced, but also provides an opportu-nity to welcome Irish and European food tourists to the region to sample the fine fayre. See also article by Anne Kinsella on pages 30-32.

Galway County Council and its local enterprise office (LEO) is partnering with Teagasc for this year's event. Activities will include:

- Food Science – The Teagasc Meat and Food Science and Food for Health programmes will present information and interactive displays.
- Cooking demonstrations – with em-phasis on lamb dishes.
- Artisan food/food markets – many new and local artisan food companies will showcase and sell their produce.
- Family vegetable garden – demon-strating the diverse range of vegeta-bles and fruit it is possible to grow in a small area.
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara – will exhibit the diverse range of local seafood products.

Information on establishing a food company. Because of the current huge interest in establishing new food companies and the development of the BIA Innovator Campus at Teagasc Athenry, stands providing the full suite of information relating to establishing a food company will be available to assist new entrepreneurs.

Galway has been named European Capital of Culture for 2020. Project Baa Baa, which is a central tenant of the planned year-long events, celebrates sheep in their entirety. Its first outing will be at Sheep 2018 and celebrates all aspects of sheep pro-duction from fabric to meat, cheeses, weaving, knotting, fashion and will be a major attraction at this year's event.

Therefore, Sheep 2018 – Farm to Fork is much more than just a sheep event. It will have major attractions for all family members and because of the significant food dimension, it is expected to attract many non-farmers.

The organisers of Sheep 2018 would like to sincerely thank main sponsor Irish Country Meats, in addition to other major sponsors MSD, Zoetis, Channelle, FBD Insurance, Germinal Seeds and Tuam Farm Supplies/Cor-mac Tagging for their kind sponsor-ship, without which it would not be possible to run an event of this scale.

Getting back on track

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Grazing

May, June and July typically deliver the highest grass growth. With focus, and a little luck, we still have time to maximise lamb performance and replenish forage supplies.

The grass supply targets for the coming months are outlined in Table 1. The days ahead guideline is an easy and practical way to manage supplies. A weekly walk of the grazing area taking note of this will provide a good estimate of how many days ahead there are on the farm.

The principle is simple. When the guideline figure is exceeded and growing conditions are good, you can afford to drop out paddocks for silage. When it's the opposite, apply additional fertiliser and/or reduce demand (eg through early weaning).

Table 1: Target grass supply on sheep farms

	Kg DM/LU	Days ahead
M Apr	300	20
E May	250	15
M May	250	12.5
E June	200	10
Mid June	200	10
E July	200	15
Mid July	200	15

Source Creighton 2016

Pre-grazing

For May and June, aim for pre-grazing covers of 1,000 to 1,500kg/DM/ha (7.5cm to 9cm). Where possible, avoid grazing heavier covers of grass 10cm+ (2000 + kg DM/ha) as utilisation levels will be lower. These areas should instead be conserved as high-quality baled silage. A word of caution here would be to avoid leaving these closed for long periods as they will often be required back in the rotation at, or prior to, weaning – remember the duration from cutting until available for grazing!.

If the overall farm cover is very low, these heavier covers may need to be grazed. If so, split the paddock and graze a section at a time.

Post-grazing

To maintain quality for the next rotation, graze down to a residual of 4cm in May, increasing to 4.5cm in June prior to weaning. However, continually grazing at low sward heights will reduce animal performance. It will also reduce overall grass production as it depletes the plant's energy reserves. To avoid setbacks in performance, we need to reduce the amount of time spent achieving this or the residency period (time spent in the paddock grazing).

Steps to reducing residency period

- **Reduce grazing area:**
 - Use temporary fences - approx. costs € 1 to 2.75 per m
 - e.g. 2 ha division per 100ewes with the option to further divide
- **Increase grazing group size**
 - Batch up ewes



- Group size according to handling yard capacity
- Rotate other stock between grazing groups (cattle)

Data from PastureBase Ireland shows that increasing the number of paddocks available for grazing on drystock farms increases the number of grazings per year and overall grass production. Additionally, it will facilitate removal of surplus silage as it allows smaller areas to be dropped out of the grazing rotation at any one time.

Fertiliser

A key priority for this year should be to address soil fertility issues on underperforming fields starting with lime, where needed. Adequate nitrogen is also crucial. A nitrogen input of 11kg to 12kg N per ewe will meet grazing and silage requirements – either in chemical or organic form. The rates suggested in Table 2 are for a stocking rate of 10 ewes per ha.

Table 2: Suggested N application rates for sheep farms*

	April	May	June/July
Kg N/ha	25	17	17
(units/ac)	(20)	(13.5)	(13.5)

Source Creighton 2016

If there are only 7 to 8 ewes/ha, reduce accordingly. However, rather than no N input during middle part of the grazing season, reduce the area spread – eg 50% early in the month and 50% in the latter half – thus balancing potential growth on the farm.

There is a case on a lot of farms to increase the amount applied in May to take advantage of better growing conditions, removing the excess as bale silage. Remember to replenish fields where silage was cut to account for offtakes of P & K.

Silage

Typically 80 to 90 units of N per ac should be applied to silage ground for the first cut. There may be a case to target a lower application rate eg 40 to 50units/ac on a proportion of the ground to allow it to be harvested in late May/early June, and meet some of the silage requirements early in the season. This ground should be available for a second cut later in the season.