



SHEEP

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Grassland – keep a close watch

Edited by
Michael Gottstein,
Head of Sheep
Knowledge Transfer

A lot of grass has accumulated on farms over the winter providing good quality grass for ewes and their lambs. It is important to keep a close watch on grass supplies as ewe demand increases rapidly after lambing and grass supplies can be quickly depleted, particularly with wet weather. Keep on top of fertiliser applications. Fertiliser applied today will take around four to six weeks to result in extra grass on the ground. Therefore it is important to plan ahead.

Aim to group ewes and lambs after two to three weeks to reduce the number of grazing groups and to get rotational grazing going. Your ideal residency period should be no longer than five days (ideally three days). If ewes are spending longer than five days in a field/paddock then you need to start splitting fields/paddocks or increase the size of the grazing group.

Prevention of grass tetany

Grass tetany is caused by a magnesium deficiency,

which is life threatening to lactating ewes. Poor weather conditions, grass scarcities, high soil potash levels and stress can trigger the condition. Treating affected ewes with 100ml of warm magnesium sulphate injections under the skin (five or six locations) can save ewes that are caught early. Grass tetany is best prevented rather than treating animals once they succumb. To prevent it, lactating ewes should be supplemented with between 3-5g of magnesium daily. In general, protection will occur one to two days after supplementation has started and will last for one to three days after supplementation has ceased. For sheep the main supplementation methods are high mag mineral buckets, concentrate supplementation, where the concentrate contains calmag (5-10kg/tonne), high mag bullets and pasture dusting. Water medication is not successful in sheep situations. It is important to limit access of male animals to magnesium to avoid urinary calculi. There is no safe amount of magnesium that can be fed to male sheep.

Lambing review

For flocks that have completed lambing now is a good time to sit down and review what happened.

What worked well and what didn't? Have a look at a few key targets – how do you compare to these? See **Table 1** and if you find that you are significantly outside of these targets then talk to your vet or adviser about ways to bring the flock's performance back in line next year.

Table 1: Lambing issues and targets.

Issue	Target
Ewe mortality (mating to end of lambing)	less than three for every 100 ewes
No. ewes prolapsed pre lambing	less than one for every 100 ewes
No. ewes aborted/failed to lamb	less than two for every 100 ewes
No. lambs turned out as a % of lambs scanned	greater than 90%
No. lambs treated for joint ill	less than one for every 100 lambs
No. lambs treated for watery mouth	less than one for every 100 lambs



*Review lambing issues and compare your results against the targets in **Table 1**.*

Safely controlling weeds in grassland

Commonly used herbicides like MCPA (e.g., Mortone, Agritox, M50, Lupo, etc.) are used to control rushes in grassland.

MCPA is very soluble so it can travel easily in waterlogged areas or water bodies and is being found in drinking water sources. MCPA takes several weeks to break down, and can persist in surface water for some time.

When using grassland herbicides (especially MCPA):

- mechanical control and good soil fertility should be the first option and then spray the regrowth and target only the rush affected areas;
- ensure that the sprayer operator is aware of any drinking water abstraction points or wells in the local area (5m to 200m safe guard zones);
- do not fill sprayers from watercourses;
- don't apply MCPA if the soil is water logged or if there is rain forecast;
- only apply MCPA if the grass and rushes are dry, and avoid windy days;
- all MCPA products have a 5m buffer zone (cannot spray within five meters) from watercourses (this includes any dry drains that could hold water);
- all pesticide containers should be triple rinsed after use with the rinse put into the sprayer;
- all foil lids from containers should be put back into the triple rinsed containers and the cap screwed tightly on; and,
- only glyphosate products can be used in weed likers.

RESEARCH UPDATE

What a difference a year makes



Fiona McGovern, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co Galway reports on the INZAC and breeding flocks at Teagasc Athenry.

Lambing commenced in the INZAC flock on February 24 this year. Having synchronised our ewes prior to A.I. in early October, our lambing spread has been quite compact with 75% of the ewes lambing at the time of writing (March 14). Lamb mortality is running at approximately 10% on average. Lamb birth weights are ranging from 6.30kg for singles, 5.18kg for twins and 4.17kg for triplets. Our ewes have maintained body condition score (BCS) from scanning to lambing, which has resulted in ample colostrum supplies at lambing. The importance of colostrum cannot be underestimated as it provides nutrients, laxatives and vital antibodies to the newborn lambs. Every effort was made in our flock to ensure that lambs received ewes' colostrum through suckling or via hand milking and stomach tubing within the first two hours of birth. Data recording takes up a lot of our time at lambing but we find it pays dividends as the year progresses. Nicola Fetherstone, INZAC PhD student, is busy recording all of our lambing data and collecting DNA samples. In addition, recording information on problem ewes is crucial when making culling decisions later in the year. The grass cover across the farm is higher than usual this year with the increased over winter grass growth. Our current average



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farm cover is 1,360kg DM/ha while grass covers on the first paddocks being grazed are between 8 and 10cm (1,200-1,400kg DM/ha). As weather conditions to date have been quite mixed, we are trying to get ewes and lambs out to grass at every opportunity. Currently we have 260 ewes lambing with approximately two-thirds of these gone out to grass. Early nitrogen (N) in the form of urea was applied at a rate of 28kg/ha (1/2 bag/ac) on all paddocks at the end of February.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Getting grazing rotation going

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

At the time of writing (March 15) lambing on the lowland flocks is progressing well with the only major issue being broken weather conditions hampering the turnout of ewes and lambs. However, a relatively good long range forecast should ease these issues in the coming week. Grass supplies across the farms are good, which is a welcome change from this time last year. The average farm covers on most of the lowland farms are in excess of 650kg DM/ha at turnout. During early April the lowland farms will be pushing to establish grazing groups and get

the grazing rotation into full swing, as well as applying a further round of fertiliser. The flock in Co. Roscommon lambled a small proportion of the ewes in early January and these lambs were weighed at the start of March with the average growth rate to seven weeks of age at 300g/day. These lambs will be monitored carefully from late March/early April to begin drafting for sale at approximately 40kg live weight. Given the high costs associated with this system it will be important to draft lambs as soon as they are fit to be drafted.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Be careful with tractors and ATVs

Farming moves fully outdoors during April as the busy grass and crop growing season gets into top gear. Farm accidents spike during busy periods so heightened safety vigilance is needed. Fatal accidents at this time of year are mainly associated with farm vehicles particularly tractors and ATVs. With tractors it is vital to watch out for bystanders and be conscious of parking vehicles correctly. With ATVs it is vital to keep in control by controlling throttle speed and shifting one's weight as counterbalance. Wear a certified helmet.



Operate ATVs safely.

