Teagasc
Advisory
Newsletter

SHEEP

June 2019

Grassland

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Getting the balance right between the quality and quantity of grass is vital in the lead up to weaning. Aim for a pre-grazing yield of 1,250-1,500kg DM/ha or 7-9cm grazing to a residual of 4.5cm. Try to keep the residency period in each paddock short to avoid grazing poorer-quality grass for long periods. Reducing grazing area by using temporary divisions, e.g., three strands of poly wire, or increasing grazing group size by bunching up ewes, or including cattle in the grazing group, will help achieve this. In many cases paddocks weren't grazed out satisfactorily in earlier rotations due to the heavy opening covers and excess supply on many farms. To maintain quality, many of these paddocks would benefit from being topped where ground allows.

To keep grass supply in check, reduce the grazing days ahead figure for the farm down to 10 days in early to mid June or 200kg DM per LU. Many farmers took advantage of surplus grass supplies during May and removed paddocks for silage. Others who have excess grass supplies on the grazing area should consider taking lighter cuts off these grazing paddocks. This will keep overall farm covers in check, provide both high-quality silage and high-quality swards that will be back in the rotation for the post-weaning period.

Many farmers took advantage of surplus grass to make silage in May.

Fertiliser applications should be kept up during June with a guideline of a further 12-18kg per hectare (10-15 units/acre) of fertiliser applied. Split applications may be advisable depending on stocking rate. It is important to target areas cut for bales with compound fertilisers or slurry where available to replenish nutrient off take.

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NSIS changes

Tagging changes come into effect

The change to the existing National Sheep Identification System (NSIS) regulations came into effect on October 1, 2018. Now the second phase of this process comes into effect. From **June 1, 2019** all sheep moving from any holding must be identified electronically. This will affect stock as follows:

- lambs aged under 12 months that are moving directly to a slaughter premises from the holding of their birth may be tagged, at a minimum, with a single yellow electronic identification (EID) tag inserted in the animal's right ear; and,
- all sheep (other than lambs aged under 12 months that move directly to slaughter from the holding of their birth) must be identified with a full set of EID tags or an electronic bolus set.

New dispatch document book

As part of the changes to the NSIS system, flock owners will have received new dispatch document books during May.

These new dispatch documents must be used when moving sheep from your holding from June 1, 2019.

Dispatch documents without bar-coded serial numbers will not be valid NSIS documentation with effect from June 1, 2019 and must not be used on or after that date.

If you haven't received these new documents you can request them by contacting your regional Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) office or the Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) division.

Upcoming events

Grass 10

Sheep Farm Walk: June 19 starting at 7.00pm sharp on the farm of Tomas O'Leary, Beaufort, Killarney, Co. Kerry. Tomas is Grassland Farmer of the Year Sheep Winner. Signposted locally and all are welcome.

NSBA

The National Sheep Breeders' Association (NSBA) is holding its national championships on June 8 in The Hub at Cíllin Hill, Kilkenny. All are welcome.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Slurry safety

Protect slurry openings when in use.

Following silage harvesting considerable quantities of slurry are spread in June and over the summer months. Slurry handling accounts for 9% of fatal farm accidents due to drowning and gassing. It is crucial to put safety first when handling slurry. Always pick a windy day when agitating slurry. Never enter a slurry tank.

Remember, one breath of poison gas, or lack of oxygen, kills. Always guard against falling into a slurry tank by using a physical barrier.

Further information can be found by doing a web search for 'Safe Slurry Handling'.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Ideal growth conditions

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

Thankfully, good weather conditions in recent weeks have allowed for ideal grass growth levels and optimum conditions for silage harvesting. Since my last update, grass growth has remained higher than previous years, averaging 75kg DM/ha from mid April to mid May. As a result, we cut 20% of each farmlet as baled silage in early May.

These were paddocks which we closed during our first grazing rotation. Since then we have cut a further 15% from each farmlet. These paddocks had yields averaging 4,500kg DM/ha and have all been harvested in dry conditions, which should provide high-quality silage for feeding the ewes next winter.

As we are midway through our second rotation, all grazing paddocks are now being subdivided for grazing. As a result, ewes and lambs are spending approximately three to four days in each section. Lamb performance for the period zero to ten weeks is presented in **Table 1**. All lambs received a dose for coccidia at five weeks and a dose for Nematodirus at six weeks of age.

The latter was based on DAFM forecasts. Lamb faecal samples are currently being collected and analysed via the FECPAK technique to determine worm burden. Our dosing decisions throughout the summer will be based on routine FECPAK results, which I will include updates on in future newsletters.

Lambs have also received their vaccinations for clostridia and pasteurella, which were given at six weeks, with the second dose at ten weeks, following manufacturer instructions.

Table 1: Lamb performance up to ten weeks.

	NZ	Elite Irish	Irish Low
Liveweight (kg)	25.5	26.5	25.0
Average daily gain (ADG) 0-10 weeks (g/day)	295	300	280

OviCast sheep podcast

Teagasc has launched a new sheep podcast called OviCast. This will give the latest advice, insights and technical updates for the sheep industry. Listen to it yourself at the following address: https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/sheep/ovicast-sheep-podcast/.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Lambs and grass growing

Frank Campion, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on strong lamb and grass growth on the BETTER farms.

At the time of writing nearly all of the seven-week weights from the mature ewes on the lowland flocks have been collected. **Table 2** shows the mean birth weight, seven-week weight and growth rate to seven weeks for seven of the lowland flocks weighed during the first two weeks of May.

Overall the growth rates are good but a couple of the flocks have fallen below target due to heath issues and are struggling to deal with heavy grass covers during the first rotation.

Data from PastureBase Ireland shows that the sheep BETTER farms have on average produced over 500kg more grass per hectare to mid May this year compared to this time last year.

Keeping grass quality in order is the main focus now as lambs begin to consume more grass. At the time of writing, nearly all the farms have made some silage, with up to 50% of the winter requirement made on some farms.

Some of the lower-stocked farms have had to keep a very close eye on their grazing days ahead in the last two months as grass growth far outstripped demand.

These flocks have made more silage than the higher-stocked farms and are only going with small quantities of fertiliser to maintain grass quality.

The start of June will mean the seven-week weights on the hill flocks will be collected and a first chance to see how these lambs are performing.

While overall conditions at lambing were favourable, the incidence of prolapses on the hill flocks was reported to be much higher than previous years.

Table 2: Mean lamb performance on lowland flocks from birth to seven weeks.

Birth type	Birth weight (kg)	Growth rate (g/day)	Seven-week weight (kg)
1	6.4	350	23.6
2	5.5	292	19.8
3+*	4.6	290	18.8

**Born as triplets and reared as twins.*

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