

# SHEEP

May 2019

## Grassland management

Edited by  
**Damian Costello**  
Sheep Specialist

Among the challenges of managing your grass well in the month of May is getting swards grazed out satisfactorily without any adverse effect on flock performance. In practice, the best way to achieve this is using temporary electric fencing to allocate enough ground to match the number of sheep in a grazing group, so that they are in and out of the area in three to four days. As an example, take 100 average size ewes and their six-week-old lambs being turned into an area measuring 1ha with an opening grass cover of 7cm (1,050kg grass DM/ha). This group size should graze a 1ha block down to the desired 4cm in about three days residency.

A second challenge is grass getting ahead and higher covers developing. Where covers go over 8cm, skip a grazing and take out surplus grass as high-quality silage bales. On farms where a rotational grazing system is in place, measuring farm grass covers weekly and inputting the data on the PastureBase



*Aim to graze out to 4cm in three days to minimise grazing of regrowth.*

Ireland system is invaluable for management. It enables you to confidently make informed grassland management decisions, especially when it comes to taking paddocks out of the rotation for silage. Contact your local Teagasc adviser for further information on getting started on grass measuring.

## Flock health issues

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's (DAFM) nematodirus forecast suggests that peak larval hatching has occurred much earlier this year in late March/early April. The recommendation is to drench lambs with a benzimidazole (white drench) group product two weeks post peak larval hatch or before this if animals show clinical signs of infection. Lambs born in early March or before should have been treated in the second or third week in April. In later-lambing flocks, treat lambs at five to six weeks of age once they are eating sufficient quantities of grass to ingest the infective larvae.

It is important to be aware that scour in lambs can also be due to coccidia. If after dosing appropriately for nematodirus, there are still scouring lambs they should be treated for coccidial infection.

There were reports in mid to late April of early occurrence of lameness in lambs, mainly due to scald. Along with being an animal welfare issue, lameness also causes a serious setback in terms of animal performance, so it's crucial to treat it promptly. As soon as the first few lame lambs are noticed, the entire flock should be foot bathed in a 10% zinc or copper sulphate solution.

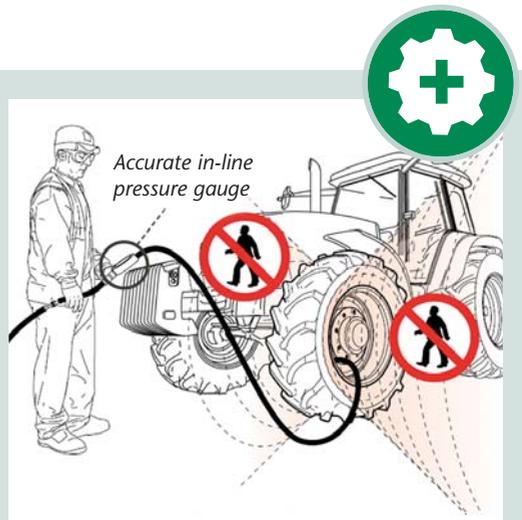
## BPS application deadline 2019

Ensure your Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) application is submitted online by the May 15 deadline, as late applications will make you liable for penalties. Contact your adviser/consultant for an appointment to ensure that this very important task is completed accurately and on time.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Fill tyres with care

Vehicle and machine tyre maintenance is critical for safety. Tyres should be inspected on a weekly basis for inflation pressure and damage. Use a reliable pressure gauge for inflation and always know the correct pressure. If a tyre side wall fails during inflation an explosive force is released at an angle of up to 45 degrees. Use a clip-on coupling to connect the airline to the tyre valve and also use a long hose to keep out of the explosion trajectory.



## BETTER FARM UPDATE



Recently lambed ewes and lambs on John Joe Fitzgerald's hill farm near Dingle, Co. Kerry on April 9. John Joe is using temporary fencing to control grass on his green ground as he builds ewe and lamb groups post lambing.

## Grazing, weighing, dosing

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the many jobs the BETTER farms have had to keep on top of recently.

### Grass

The second rotation is now under way for the lowland flocks, with nearly all grazing groups established. Group sizes across the farms differ depending on flock size, but vary from 50 to 200 ewes and their lambs per group. Despite grass supplies being good, all the farms have continued to apply fertiliser, even if at reduced rates in order to maintain grass quality and address soil fertility issues where necessary. The farms have also begun closing off paddocks for silage, with the focus on paddocks gone too strong for grazing.

### Time to start weighing lambs again

During the first two to three weeks of May all of the lowland lambs will be weighed for their seven-week weight, which will provide the first proper indication of how lambs are performing

this year. For the Co. Tipperary flock, which began lambing at the end of January, some of the lambs have already had their seven-week weight recorded, with growth rates averaging 265g/day since birth. The Co. Roscommon BETTER farm began drafting lambs from its early lambing flock in April, with approximately 26% of lambs drafted as of the second week of April.

### Dosing

Lambs were treated for nematodirus in April, in line with the DAFM warning, using a white drench (benzimidazole; 1-BZ). Some farms may need to dose a second time for nematodirus, where some of the lambs are still quite young and the first dose may have been too early. Faecal sampling of lambs will begin this month (May) to allow for FECPAK analysis to establish when further worm dosing is required.

## RESEARCH UPDATE



# The low-down on lambing

PHILIP CREIGHTON, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lambing on the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm in Athenry.

Lambing commenced on March 4 and finished on April 9. Mean lambing date for 2019 was March 14. Approximately 90% of the flocks lambled over the first 17 days. Birth weights for singles, twins and triplets averaged 5.8, 4.9 and 4.0kg, respectively. Lamb mortality levels averaged 10% for the period of birth to one week old. Lambing assistance was recorded, with 31% of ewes requiring some level of assistance, which is up about 10% on normal levels, although about half of this was very minor. We had a higher than normal amount of malpresented births, which accounted for 60% of assisted births. A total of 18% of lambs required help to suck or were fed additional artificial milk after birth, mainly triplets. Average ewe body condition score (BCS) going out to grass was 3.2. Weather conditions were very challenging at times and we did have to hold ewes and lambs in longer than normal, with some housed for up to a week



post lambing. In total contrast to last spring, grass growth rates have been very strong during March and early April, averaging ~40kg grass DM/ha/day. As a result, we have had very strong grass covers and made the decision to skip over the last 20% of each farmlet, which were closed for silage in mid April in order to start the second rotation on time. This area was grazed out tight in December so quality shouldn't be impacted. Paddocks were subdivided once lambs reached two weeks of age and we also increased our post grazing height from 3.5-4cm to help deal with the heavier than normal grass covers. To date, a total of 57kg of nitrogen (N) has been applied per ha (46 units/ac) in mid February and early April. Preliminary analysis of lamb performance to five weeks of age shows average daily gains of 270g (13 ewes/ha stocking rate) to 280g (11 ewes/ha stocking rate) per head per day. Ewe BCS has also reduced to average 2.9.