

SHEEP

August 2019

Grassland management

Edited by
Damian Costello,
Sheep Specialist

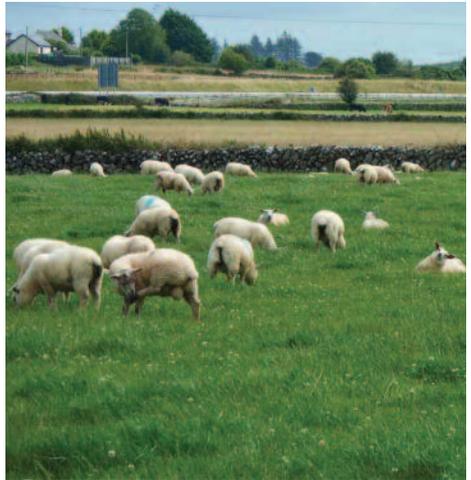
Aim to keep top-quality grass available to lambs post weaning. In rotational grazing systems a leader/follower system works well – lambs being allowed to graze down to 6cm with a group of ewes in good body condition following to further take sward height down to 4cm.

Managing body condition of the ewe flock now will impact next season's lamb crop. The starting point is putting your ewes through a race and handling each ewe to assess body condition.

The thinner ewes in your flock need to be grouped and also given access to high-quality grass from early August if intended for mating in early October.

For the average lowland ewe to go from body condition score (BCS) 2.5 up to 3.5, she needs to gain in the order of 10-12kg bodyweight. This is why allowing enough time to build body condition is critical.

Ewes that fail to regain body condition after preferential grazing treatment should be culled as it is an indication of an underlying issue.



Keeping top-quality grass available to lambs is critical to performance.

Preparing rams for breeding season

As with ewes, body condition of rams should be assessed at this stage. It may be necessary to supplement grass with a concentrate suitable for feeding to rams to build body condition in the lead up to turnout. Pay particular attention to any signs of ill health in your rams and deal with any issues such as lameness promptly. Any infection that gives rise to even a slight temperature rise (as little as half a degree) can render a ram temporarily infertile. This is one of the reasons why it is recommended to source any replacement rams well before the intended start of breeding season. Furthermore buying early gives you a greater choice of rams and

will allow replacements coming onto the farm a chance to settle in to the new environment well in advance of the mating season. Thoroughly inspect and check all the physical traits of any ram before purchase. The other valuable information to consider before purchase is the Sheep Ireland Eurostar ratings. A ram intended as a terminal sire with high terminal index figures should have lower lambing difficulty and progeny that will grow faster, ultimately being ready for slaughter quicker. If you choose a high-index ram to breed replacements from, you can expect daughters with lower mortality and higher litter sizes.

Enzootic abortion vaccine supply issue

There is a potential issue with the availability of the sheep vaccine which is used against enzootic (chlamydial) abortion. It is understood that Interchem has secured a limited supply of an

alternative vaccine under a special license. The advice to those intending to vaccinate against enzootic abortion this year is to contact your vet immediately to discuss the options.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Display your Eircode

Everything should be done to prevent injury and ill health. However, when an emergency arises it is crucial to call the emergency services immediately using 112/999. It is vital to have an Eircode readily available as this allows emergency and medical services to locate an exact rural location speedily. It is also advised to have the Eircodes of elderly relatives and neighbours available if needed.

Display your Eircode in a prominent and accessible place on the farm and save in



EIRCODE

E32 YW08

Display your Eircode.

mobile phones. Undertaking first-aid training is also strongly advised to deal with emergencies.



RESEARCH UPDATE

INZAC Flock Athenry – Ideal grass growth



Fiona McGovern of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports that lamb drafting continues amid ideal grass growing conditions for the INZAC Flock.

Grass growing conditions have remained optimum here in Athenry since my last update. Given the fine weather, grass growth rates have declined slightly at 45kg DM/ha however, as this occurred post weaning our demand was 33kg DM/ha which meant that we remained in a surplus.

We have harvested an additional 25% of each farmlet as surplus baled silage. It is a far cry from this time last year when we had to supplement our ewes with silage in the paddock!

All lambs in the INZAC flock were weaned on June 11, at approximately 100 days of age. To date over 100 lambs have been drafted from the experiment, with the largest proportion of these lambs coming from both the New Zealand and elite Irish groups.

As part of the INZAC study, Sheep Ireland is ultrasound scanning all of the lambs for back fat and muscle depth. This is done to give us an indication of carcass

development as a proportion of the lambs are subsequently kept on the farm and used as replacement animals for breeding. As we go to print lambs are currently averaging 39kg liveweight and are growing at approximately 230g/day post weaning.

We are continuing to monitor the faecal egg counts (FECs) of lambs and are continuing to perform fortnightly cobalt drenches at each weighing. All lambs received a parasite drench at 20 weeks of age (six weeks post weaning) as FEC results showed stomach worm counts in excess of 500 eggs per gram.

We have also been carrying out FEC reduction tests in order to monitor the resistance status of our animals' routinely available drenches. At this point all ewes have been thoroughly examined and cross checked against lambing records in order to make culling decisions and to avoid holding onto problem ewes within the flock.

Upcoming events

August 24: Annual Sheep Ireland €uroStar Multi-Breed Ram Sale in Tullamore Mart.

BETTER Farm Hill Sheep Events

September 10: farm of John Joe Fitzgerald, Ballydavid, Co. Kerry.

September 12: farm of Francis Gonely, Tormore, Glencar, Co. Sligo.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Decision time

Frank Campion, of the Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre in Athenry, reports on decisions to be made about selling or finishing lambs.

As the hill flocks begin weaning this month, attention turns to what to do with these lambs. A lot of this decision will hinge on the amount of grass available and how much will be needed for the ewes in run up to mating time. With this in mind, the management of the lamb crop from weaning will differ on the farms with some needing to sell the majority as stores and others looking at options for finishing lambs outdoors and indoors later in the year. The performance of the lambs to seven weeks on three of the flocks is summarised in **Table 1**. Overall this performance was quite good and the number

of lambs returned at seven weeks compared to what was born was, for the most part, also good. On the lowland flocks weaning is now completed and ram and ewe lambs divided where necessary. Drafting rates are currently ahead of previous years and overall lamb performance is good. The performance of the lambs on the lowland flocks from the mature ewes to 14 weeks (weaning) is summarised in **Table 2**. Over the next few weeks, ewes will be assessed for BCS and thin ewes picked out, marked and given preferential treatment. Any thin ewes who fail to regain condition will be culled prior to mating.

Table 1: Lamb performance on three of the BETTER farm hill sheep flocks from birth to seven weeks.

| | Birth weight (kg) | | Growth rate (g/day) | | Seven-week weight (kg) | |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|------------------------|-----------|
| | Mean | Range | Mean | Range | Mean | Range |
| Birth type | | | | | | |
| 1 | 5.3 | 5.3-5.5 | 297 | 278-320 | 19.8 | 18.6-21.0 |
| 2 | 4.5 | 4.1-4.8 | 246 | 219-298 | 16.7 | 15.9-19.4 |

Table 2: Preliminary analysis of the lamb performance on five of the BETTER farm lowland sheep flocks from birth to 14 weeks (weaning).

| | Growth rate (g/day) | | 14 week-weight (kg) | |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|-----------|
| | Mean | Range | Mean | Range |
| Birth type | | | | |
| 1 | 306 | 284-324 | 35 | 29.7-37.6 |
| 2 | 268 | 250-285 | 30.5 | 28.3-32.5 |
| 3+ | 268 | 248-285 | 29.9 | 28.3-31.0 |