

Sheep

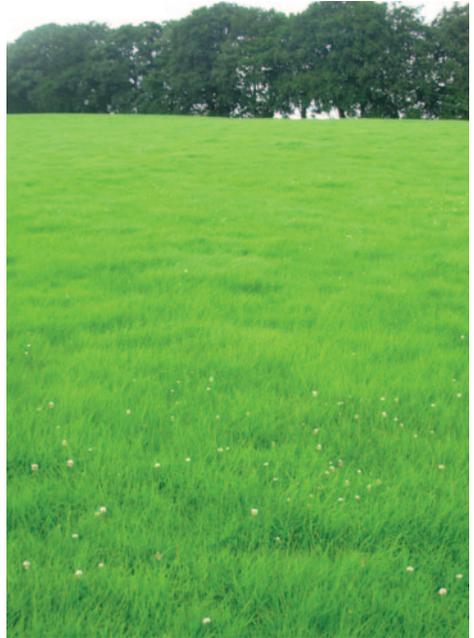
June 2020

Grassland

Growth rates on farms have been variable during May, mainly determined by rainfall as indicated in the BETTER Farm and Research Updates. Soil moisture deficits are limiting growth in the eastern part of the country, putting supplies under pressure. Conversely, many took advantage of the growing conditions and removed the surplus, so that grass coming into the system in late May/early June can boost lamb performance.

For June, the target is to have 10 days' grazing ahead of the flock to balance out supply and maintain the grazing rotation. Farms where growth rate has suffered and overall farm covers are low need to prioritise lamb growth. Early weaning may be an option worth considering for these flocks. Aim for pre-grazing covers of 1,200kg DM/ha or 8cm grazing to a residual of 4.5cm. Reducing the size of larger grazing areas through the use of temporary fencing will reduce residency time, time spent grazing low covers, and aid better clean outs.

Edited by
Ciaran Lynch,
Sheep Specialist



Aim for pre-grazing covers of 1,200kg DM/ha or 8cm grazing to a residual of 4.5cm.

Content for children

As part of the initiative to keep pupils learning in a fun and innovative way, Teagasc has started creating downloadable games/puzzles, and also a YouTube series called 'Science Experiments at Home', where our researchers show children different experiments they can do from home with materials that are found in every house. 'Science Experiments at Home' with Brian McGuinness (Technologist) is a very entertaining episode that explores the science of DNA extraction, instant ice and also other experiments. In this episode, Brian uses the help of his children Maisie and Conn to



show how simple and fun these experiments can be. Find out more at: www.teagasc.ie/about/research-innovation/science-communications-and-outreach/resources-for-teachers-primary-level/.

Blowfly

As we're in the high-risk period for blowfly, any farms that haven't implemented preventive measures need to do so. It is important to understand how different products work, and the period of cover they provide. Equally, correct application procedure is essential. Scan the QR code for a short video explaining this in more



It is now the high-risk period for blowfly.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Farm deaths rise

Farm workplace deaths have risen sharply during May. This must motivate us all in the farming sector to redouble our efforts to cut accidents and the associated tragedies. This month we enclose a children's safety newsletter 'Jessy's Smart Kids'. Please discuss it with your children to motivate safety actions. Also ask teachers to circulate with school apps and web messages from the link at the Teagasc website.



A good idea is to have a 'line' to mark the boundary between household and farm, with a family agreement for children not to cross without permission. June is a high-risk month, due to farming activities with machinery and livestock. In particular, bulls are with herds, so it is vital to protect yourself. When in a field, use a vehicle as a mobile defence and always keep sight of the bull.

RESEARCH UPDATE



INZAC and breeding flocks at Teagasc Athenry

Fiona McGovern, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on grass growth and lamb performance.

Ideal grass growing conditions

Thankfully, good weather conditions in recent weeks have allowed for ideal grass growth levels and optimum conditions for silage harvesting. Since my last update, in April, grass growth has jumped in recent weeks, with average growth rates of 90-110kg DM/ha throughout May. As a result, we cut 20% of each farmlet as baled silage in mid May. These were paddocks which we closed at the end of our first grazing rotation. Since then we have cut a further 15% from each farmlet. Paddocks are averaging 3,000kg DM/ha and have all been harvested in dry conditions, which should provide high-quality silage for feeding the ewes next winter. All grazing paddocks are now being subdivided for grazing to ensure they are being grazed out properly, and allowing for fresh re-growth. As a result, ewes and lambs are spending approximately three/four days in each section.

Lamb performance for the period 0-10 weeks is

presented in **Table 1**. All lambs received a dose at eight weeks for nematodirus. Lamb faecal samples are currently being collected and monitored via FECPAK every fortnight. Our dosing decisions throughout the summer will be based on routine FECPAK results, which I will include further updates on. Lambs have also received their vaccinations for clostridia and pasteurilla, which were given at six weeks, and the second dose at ten weeks, following manufacturer instructions. Lastly, I want to say a massive thank you to our technicians, farm staff and farm manager, who are travelling to work and looking after all of our animals during this time.

Table 1: Lamb performance from birth to 10 weeks.

	NZ	Elite Irish	Irish Low
Liveweight (kg)	27.0	27.9	25.6
Average daily gain (ADG) 0-10 weeks (g/day)	317	326	293

Weaning

Midseason flocks are approaching weaning this month. Ewes should be weaned by the time lambs are 14 weeks of age and can be weaned earlier than this without adversely affecting lamb performance. For suckling yearling ewes, this can be reduced to 10 to 12 weeks to allow sufficient time to recover. Each year there is a temptation to get a couple of drafts away first. The short-term gain may come at a longer-term cost. As lambs approach weaning, their grass intake increases considerably, and they begin

competing with ewes for access to the best pasture. Also, as ewe milk yield will drop off, their contribution to lamb performance is reduced. For farms with a lower grass supply, earlier weaning will help reduce demand, as ewes can be tightened up for a number of weeks. Pre-weaning ewes will be consuming 2.3-2.5kg DM/hd/day. This can be reduced to 1kg DM/hd/day once weaned. Priority can then be given to weaned lambs by giving them access to the best available grazing.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Lamb growth on target

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

At the time of writing, nearly all of the seven-week weights from the lambs of the mature ewes on the lowland farms have been collected. **Table 2** shows the mean birth weight, growth rate to seven weeks, and seven-week weight for five of the lowland flocks weighed in early May. Growth rates for the lambs to seven weeks are on target, with lambs generally performing well so far this year. The key for these farms will be to maintain grass quality in front of the ewes and lambs up to weaning.

Grass growth rates have on average been steady, at approximately 55kg DM/ha in the first half of May on the farms, but with a wide variation most weeks. Comparatively long periods of dry weather for this time of year in some parts of the country are slowing grass

growth rates on some of the farms. A number of the farms made silage in early May, mainly as a result of dropping out surplus paddocks from the rotation. When the data from PastureBase Ireland for the BETTER sheep flocks is examined, it shows that the total grass grown per hectare this year is very similar to 2018, and approximately half a tonne less than where it was at this time in 2019 due mainly to poor growth from January to March.

The first weighing of lambs from the hill flocks will take place in the coming weeks, with anecdotal evidence from the flocks suggesting that lambs are doing well so far this year. Where possible, the farms have begun letting single-rearing ewes and their lambs back out to the hill.

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	6.2	350	23.5
2	5.4	297	20.0
3+*	4.6	302	19.4

*Born as triplets and reared as twins.

OviCast

The Teagasc Sheep podcast has regular updates covering technical aspects on grassland, breeding, nutrition and health, as well as industry-focused episodes. Scan the QR code and start listening.

