

SHEEP

October 2020

Grassland management

Edited by
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October is the time of year to start planning for grass next March. Grass swards need at least 120 days rest to have an adequate cover for ewes after lambing. Many farmers don't do this and end up short of grass after lambing when ewes are hitting their peak milk yield and this subsequently ends up reducing lamb growth rates. For most mid-March lambing flocks the aim should be to start closing paddocks or fields

from the end of October onwards. Close the grazing areas in the order in which you intend to graze them in the spring time, i.e., those closest to the yard and with shelter should be closed first.

Before closing, graze out the grass fully to allow light down to the base of the sward and to encourage tillering. This will reduce the amount of dead material in the sward next spring.

Mating management

Raddle, raddle and raddle. I cannot stress enough the importance of raddling rams to enable you to monitor mating performance and spot problems quickly. Every year Teagasc advisors get calls from sheep farmers who get a shock at scanning time. It is too late to do anything about it when you find out at scanning time that your ewes are empty. Raddle paste (powder mixed with oil), raddle crayon, or harness and crayon are cheap and easy to apply. It is money well spent. Start with

the lighter colours first:



Body temperature rises above normal will cause temporary infertility in rams. Make sure that you know the history of your ram flock for the previous six weeks prior to mating. Have a spare ram or two so that you can replace injured or infertile rams if needed. Ewes should be on a rising plane of nutrition in the run up to mating and for the mating period. Good quality grass is what is needed. There is no benefit in treating ewes for worms pre mating (unless there is a demonstrated

need, e.g., *haemonchus contortus* or barber's pole worm infection). Treating ewes needlessly simply speeds up the development of resistant stomach worms on your farm.

Ewe lambs must be at least 60% of their mature weight if they are being mated this year. Mating ewe lambs that are below this target is not a good idea. Belclare X ewes have a mature weight of approximately 70-75kg, so the 60% target here is 42-45kg. Terminal X ewes (Suffolk, Texel and Charollais) have a mature weight of approximately 80-85kg, so the 60% target for these breeds is 48-51kg. Delay mating ewe lambs for two weeks after the rams are turned out with the mature ewes. This will mean that most of the ewes will have lambed before the ewe lambs start lambing. Generally a three-week mating period is what is recommended for ewe lambs.

Soil fertility

Now is a good time to take soil samples.



Autumn and winter are good times to take soil samples if you haven't done so in the last four to five years. Also where samples have been taken and lime needs to be applied, then over the coming months is a good time to do this.

Key dates for animal manure applications

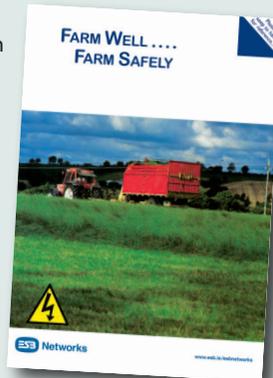
The last day for spreading slurry is the October 14 and the last day for spreading farmyard manure is October 31.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Check lighting and electrical switches



The clocks go back on October 25, which brings shorter daylight time. In advance of this, check your farmyard lighting. Bulbs may need to be replaced and fluorescent covers may need cleaning to maximise light output. To prevent trips and falls, make sure that all walkways are well lit and free of trip hazards. Also, safety test your electrical residual current devices (RCDs) on switchboards. An RCD is an



electrical safety trip switch, which trips if an electrical leakage occurs. A trip switch is mechanical and needs to be test tripped regularly to ensure it is working. This is done by ensuring that there are no electrical devices operating and physically tripping the switch.

Consult the ESB Networks booklet: *Farm Well Farm Safely*.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Examine the last 5% to lamb

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry reports on the Better sheep flocks..



The time it can take for the last 5% of the flock to lamb can drag on.

The mid-season lowland flocks will begin joining rams to the flocks between October 1 and 26 depending on desired lambing date. Rams will be raddled and the colour changed frequently so as to identify rams that are not performing, but also to allow later lambing ewes and repeats to be fed separately where possible during late pregnancy. Rams will remain with ewes for approximately six weeks. Leaving rams in longer than this can seem advantageous at this time of year to potentially increase pregnancy rate, but as shown in **Table 1**, the time it can take for the last 5% of the flock to lamb can drag on when leaving rams in for a longer periods. For the flocks taking a long time for the last 5% to lamb, the justification of this time and labour needs to be considered. An alternative option is to let a few more ewes out to the

ram than is needed so that when the empty ewes are culled the number of ewes remains on target.

New flocks

We are pleased to announce that two new flocks are joining the BETTER farm sheep programme this year: Paul Boyle who runs both a hill and lowland flock near Bruckless in Co. Donegal; and, Kevin Carey who also runs both a hill and lowland flock near Belmullet in Co. Mayo. Both flocks began performance recording ahead of the breeding season and a detailed farm plan for each farm is being put together.

Table 1: Summary of some of the lambing statistics from lowland BETTER sheep farms in 2020.

	Mean	Min	Max
Percentage of ewes lambled in first three weeks of lambing	83	64	96
No. of days for last 5% to lamb	13	2	29

RESEARCH UPDATE



Planning mating for the INZAC flock

FIONA McGOVERN, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway, reports on a new production year commencing at the INZAC flock.

Grass growing conditions have remained consistent since my last update. Average grass growth over the past few weeks has been 75kg DM/day with 30 days ahead. Having a surplus for us at this time of year is always welcome as our grazing pressure increases with multiple mating groups. As we head into the autumn and the beginning of a new production year, we are building grass supplies to carry us through to housing in December. Importantly, we will also concentrate on closing paddocks to ensure that there will be enough grass for ewes after lambing next year. Grassland will need a rest period of 120 days over the winter, which means we need to begin closing paddocks from October 15. As we go to print, the INZAC Suffolk and Texel ewes are being sponged, using Chronogest sponges and will receive an injection of 400i.u. PMSG prior to artificial insemination, which is due to take place on October 7 and 14 this year. All ewes have been weighed, body condition scored and divided into mating groups. As we use approximately 30 rams across the flock for mating, it is important that all ewes are allocated correctly to their mating group. Each of our ewes is artificially inseminated using fresh semen and subsequently run with rams for up to two repeat cycles. Inbreeding analysis



This year we are also mating a group of New Zealand ewes with Elite Irish rams as we begin phase II of the project.

is carried out across all of our flock to ensure there is no interrelationship between ewes and rams at mating. This year we are also mating a group of New Zealand ewes with Elite Irish rams as we begin phase II of the project. Prior to mating rams have been assessed and are receiving 500g/concentrates per head per day to ensure they reach a body condition score (BCS) target of 3.5-4.0 at mating. The remainder of the 2020 lambs continue to graze ahead of the ewes in a leader-follower system. Since mid September our lighter lambs are receiving concentrate supplementation at 350g per head per day. Drafting patterns are on target with 87%, 82% and 65% lambs drafted from the New Zealand, Elite Irish and Low Irish groups, respectively.