

# SHEEP

November 2020

Edited by  
**Damian Costello,**  
Sheep Specialist

## Grassland management

Continue to graze out and close paddocks aiming to clean off pastures well, which allows light to get to the base of grass plant. This encourages tillering and also ensures high quality spring pastures. The challenge is achieving the desired closing cover of 3.5 to 4cm whilst avoiding any negative impact on ewe reproductive performance. One option is to use a group of replacement ewe lambs not being mated, if available, to finish off paddocks after the breeding flock. The more practical option is using temporary fencing to subdivide

fields into three-to-four day allocations thus getting swards grazed down quickly. The main factor that determines the amount of grass available in early March is date of closing. The aim for March-lambing flocks is to have 40% of the farm closed by mid November and 60% by the end of November. A high proportion of total winter grass growth takes place in the months of October and November. Once you've closed a paddock, resist the temptation to regraze as this grass will be worth much more to you next spring.

## Monitor breeding flock

Observe the progress of mating by changing raddle colour at least every two weeks. If you find a significant number (greater than 15%) of repeats it is most likely an indicator of a ram fertility issue but there is still time to address this problem. There is potential to join groups of ewes up at this stage and less ram power will be

required to cover any repeats. Remove the ram if you suspect a fertility problem as well as rams with any physical issue. Ram lambs could also be pulled at this stage to avoid putting them under too much pressure in their first season. When rams are removed from the ewes at the end of breeding they should be placed on a high plane of nutrition to regain body condition lost during mating.

## Options for remaining lambs



*Grass supply determines your options.*

At this time of year available grass needs to be prioritised for the breeding ewes. Grass supply on the farm will determine what the options are in relation to remaining lambs. The Teagasc store lamb calculator is a useful and simple to use tool to estimate the costs of finishing lambs on both outdoor and indoor systems. This allows for a more informed decision on whether to finish lambs or sell on as stores. Take an example of a lowland farm where

grass is available to keep at least some lambs outdoors but some will be housed for finishing. The remaining 85 lowland lambs on the farm are divided into three groups as follows:

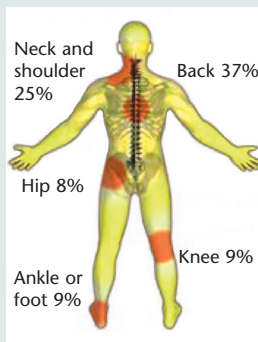
- 1) finishing group of 25 (42-45kg) on grass and concentrates will remain outdoors and will be finished within a few weeks;
- 2) group of 40 forward store lambs (36-40kg) are being housed and gradually built up to ad lib concentrates with access to roughage and clean water supply; and,
- 3) group of lighter lambs in and around 30kg for which housing and intensive finishing is uneconomic. The idea would be to get lighter lambs up to 36-40kg liveweight on grass and a low level of concentrate at which point they are housed for intensive finishing. If you don't have the grass available, sell these lighter lambs as stores.

## HEALTH & SAFETY



### Prevent musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are injuries of muscles, ligaments, tendons, cartilage, discs and bones. A study among Irish farmers found that 54% reported an MSD, making them the most prevalent occupational health problem. All MSDs, including so-called 'slipped discs', are painful and need rehabilitation. Preventing MSDs requires your input as follows: (1) use equipment and design facilities that eliminate or reduce the need for



*MSD injuries of Irish farmers.*

lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling; (2) always assess a load before lifting; and, (3) keep a tidy and well-lit farmyard to prevent trips and falls. The EU Occupational Safety and Health Agency (EUOSHA) campaign Lighten the Load 2020-22 has commenced. Further information at: <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/en>.

## BETTER FARM UPDATE



*Grass growth rates were good for the most part in October.*

## Ewes in good condition

FRANK CAMPION of the Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre at Athenry reports from the BETTER farm programme.

Initial analysis of mating liveweights and body condition scores (BCS) for the mature ewes from five of the lowland BETTER sheep flocks is presented in **Table 1**. Overall ewe BCS is generally very good, which is a reflection of the attention the farms have given to assessing and managing ewes for the previous two months. Where ewe lambs are being mated, the ram will be joined with these two-to-three weeks

after the rams are joined with the mature ewes. All of the lowland farms are closely following their autumn closing plan, which is vital to ensuring that there is sufficient grass available at lambing time next year. Grass growth rates and utilisation were good for the most part in October. As winter nears, planning for winter feeding is also under way and silage analysis will be carried out in the next few weeks. All of the hill farms will have their ewes weighed and condition scored in the coming weeks prior to the ram being joined with the ewes. Gathering of these ewes has not begun at the time of writing but it is hoped that after the comparatively good weather conditions over the past few weeks, ewes will be in good BCS coming in off the hills.

**Table 1: Initial analysis of mature ewe liveweight and BCS on five of the lowland sheep flocks.**

Flock County	Kearney Louth	O'Connell Leitrim	O'Leary Kerry	O'Toole Galway	Powell Tipperary
Mean liveweight (kg)	74.1	76.7	72.8	65.9	65.2
Mean BCS	3.1	3.3	3.6	3.4	3.5

## RESEARCH UPDATE



# Kill out averaging 44%

PHILIP CREIGHTON, reports from the Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway.

Rams were turned out to ewes on October 9. Ewe BCS going to the ram averaged 3.1. Up to early October approximately 60% of lambs from the grass-only treatments and 71% of lambs from the grass plus white clover treatments had been drafted. Lambs drafted to date have averaged 45.4kg liveweight producing a 20.05kg carcass, with kill out averaging 44%. Lamb performance and drafting pattern was particularly slow during August. Lamb performance and drafting rates have improved in the last month with lambs gaining 159g/hd/day (grass only) to 175g/day (grass plus clover) from mid September to mid

October. We have introduced concentrate supplementation at a rate of 300g/hd/day since early October. Grass growth rate has averaged 66kg DM/ha/day for September and 39kg DM/ha/day for early October. We currently have approximately 40 days' grass ahead of groups on average. Closing of paddocks commenced in mid October to build grass for next spring. The plan is to have approximately 20% of each farmlet closed on average by late October, 40% by mid November, 60% by late November and 80% by mid December, with the remainder by late December/early January.

**Ovicast Sheep Podcast**

Ovicast is Teagasc's regular podcast covering news, information, tips and advice for sheep farmers.

Presented by Ciaran Lynch, Ovicast provides insights and opinion to improve your sheep farm performance.

**How do I listen?**

Ovicast is available on:

iPhone Android Spotify

Open the camera on your phone & scan the QR code for more information