

SHEEP

June 2021

Managing grassland

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Grass intake in March-born lambs will be approaching 1-1.2kg dry matter (DM) per day by June and they will be actively competing with the ewe flock for high-quality forage. Aim for a short residency period in each paddock during June – three to four days maximum to avoid grazing poorer-quality lower covers for long periods. Reducing grazing area by using temporary divisions, e.g., three strands of poly wire, or increasing grazing group size by bunching up ewes, or including cattle in the grazing group, will help achieve this. This will help maintain quality and quantity of grass supply in this important phase of the season. Remember for flocks only introducing temporary fencing to a group for the first time, it's essential there is a good constant power supply. When using poly wire, make sure there is no break in connection. Aim for a pre-grazing yield of 1,250-1,500kg DM/ha or 7-9cm grazing to a residual of 4.5cm.

Fertiliser applications should be kept up during June with a guideline of a further 12-18kg per hectare (10-15 units/acre) of fertiliser applied. Split applications may be advisable depending on stocking rate.

With the low growth in the earlier part of the season, many farms had to graze ground closed for silage. As a result, harvest date will be delayed for many farms and this may impact on silage quality. Plan for cutting about six to seven weeks after closing up with a suitable level of fertiliser application. Ensure paddocks are grazed out fully before closing to remove dead material – dry hoggets may aid in this process. In addition, remove surpluses during the season as they occur as this will help meet the demand for high-quality silage and also help maintain grass quality. Remember it is important to target areas cut for bales with compound fertilisers or slurry where available to replenish nutrient off take.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Increasing grass growth after a slow start

EDEL O'CONNOR, PhD student, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the INZAC and breeding flocks.

After a challenging spring, good weather conditions in recent weeks have allowed for increased grass growth levels and optimum conditions for silage harvesting. Since my last update, in April, grass growth has jumped in recent weeks with an average growth rate of 78kg DM/ha throughout May. As a result, we cut 20% of each farmllet as baled silage in mid May. These were paddocks which we closed at the end of our first grazing rotation. Paddocks are averaging 4,000kg 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-to-four days in each section.

Lamb performance for the period 0-8 weeks is presented in **Table 1**. All lambs received a dose at six 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 pasturella, which were also given at six weeks and the second dose at 10 weeks, following manufacturer instructions.



Table 1: Lamb performance for the period 0-8 weeks.

	NZ	Elite Irish	Irish low
Eight week performance			
Liveweight, kg	24.2	21.7	21.0
ADG* 0-8 weeks, g/day	320	299	284

*Average daily gain

UPCOMING EVENT

Let's Talk Sheep webinar

Join us at 8.00pm on June 3 for part of the Let's Talk Sheep webinar series, as we sit down with BETTER sheep farmer Shane Moore in an hour-long interactive webinar to discuss infrastructure required for flock expansion on your sheep farm.

To find out more and register for this event go to the Teagasc website <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/national-events/events/bettersheep-farm-open-day.php>, or alternatively scan the following QR code shown here.

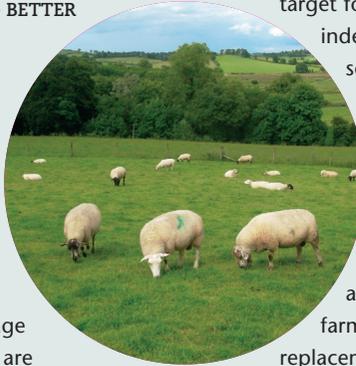


BETTER FARM UPDATE

Grass growth rates

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on conditions at the BETTER sheep farms.

Grass growth for the BETTER sheep farms has been variable during the month of May, with supplies behind where they were last year when a number of the farms had silage made in early May. At the time of writing, none of the farms have made silage yet. However, grass growth rates are rising to more normal levels, with the group averaging 62kg DM/ha/day in mid May with some farms growing up to 88kg DM/ha/day. As growth rates rise and lambs become more reliant on grass to drive performance as they grow older, ensuring that the flock has good-quality grass in front of it is vital to keeping lambs performing up to weaning time. The farms will be targeting 10 grazing days ahead from early June and will be dropping out paddocks and subdividing paddocks as necessary to keep to this target and optimise performance of the flock.



Most of the lowland farms have completed the seven week weights for the lambs from the mature ewes, as presented in **Table 2**. Lamb growth rates to seven weeks are on target for most of the flocks and indeed have exceeded that in some cases. Performance to seven weeks is largely a reflection of the ewe's milk production and as a result these weights are not only an important indicator of current performance but also can be used by the farmers when selecting replacement ewe lambs later in the year. Farms have also begun sending lamb faecal samples for FECPAK analysis and will continue to do this over the coming months to assess when lambs need anthelmintic treatments. Where possible the hill farms have begun letting single-rearing ewes and their lambs back out to the hill with anecdotal evidence from the flocks suggesting that lambs are doing well so far this year. These lambs will be weighed at seven weeks of age also when a more detailed assessment of the performance to date can be made.

Table 2: Mean lamb performance from the lowland flocks from birth to seven weeks of age (with range in brackets).

Birth type	Birth weight (kg)	Growth rate (g/day)	Seven-week weight (kg)
1	6.0 (5.2-6.7)	344 (323-381)	23.0 (22.1-25.3)
2	5.2 (4.6-5.5)	294 (277-321)	19.6 (18.3-21.2)
3+	4.4 (3.7-4.8)	286 (260-330)	18.5 (16.5-21.2)

Precision livestock farming for sheep – have your say

TIM KEADY of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway outlines how the Sm@rt project is aiming to address the challenges to increasing EU flock profitability.

Sheep and goat farming are important to the rural economy of Ireland, Europe and in many other countries across the world. New tools called Precision Livestock Farming (PLF) tools, also known as digital technologies, have been developed for other sectors such as dairy, to improve farm efficiency. However, the development and uptake of such tools has been slower in the small ruminant industry. A new EU-funded project named Sm@RT (Small Ruminant Technologies) will bring

together a network of researchers from seven countries across Europe (Ireland, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, UK) and Israel. The aim of Sm@rt is to increase the awareness of those working in the sheep and goat sectors of newly available PLF tools, demonstrating their potential to improve productivity and labour efficiency and possible return on investment. The network will engage with a wide range of sheep and goat farming systems across the continent.

The Sm@rt project team is seeking farmers' and stakeholders' opinions on PLF tools. You can become involved in the project by completing a short survey to help the SM@RT project team understand the main challenges, needs and interests along the whole sheep and goat value chain for PLF tools and digital technologies. The survey is available at the following link and will be open to responses for one month (<https://bit.ly/3sl0Eni>).

Blowfly

Blowfly strike affects the vast majority of flocks each season and needs to be addressed by implementing protective measures in time, before strike occurs. Early application of the chosen product will also help reduce the fly population on your farm. Be aware of how different products work, and the period of cover they provide. It's particularly



important to note the differences in withdrawal date, especially when treating forward lambs.

Equally don't forget to treat ewes in a timely manner post shearing. With any of the chosen control options correct application procedure is essential.

To find out more about this topic scan the QR code here.

