

SHEEP

July 2021

Grassland management

Edited by
Michael Gottstein,
Head of Sheep Knowledge Transfer

Grass has been growing rapidly through June. Many farmers have a lot of grass and it is getting stemmy and digestibility is reducing rapidly. Measure how much grass you have on your farm. How many days grazing would you have for all your stock if grass growth completely stopped? Many farms have a huge amount of grass on farm (20+ days ahead), which is almost double what they should have. The target for July is to have 12-14 days of grass ahead. Fields that have gone

ahead should be taken out for silage. Don't move through heavy covers quicker to try and catch up – this will result in poor-quality grass in the next rotation.

Keep on top of grass quality by grazing at the correct sward height and using dry ewes (or by topping down to 4cm) to clean out paddocks after the lambs. Lambs should only be eating short (7-9cm) leafy grass, anything longer is not going to facilitate good weight gain.

Weaning

There is no benefit in leaving lambs suckling ewes longer than 100 days (14 weeks). After weaning ewes should be restricted for a week and then have access to grass to regain body condition. It is not a good idea to restrict ewes for long periods and force them to lose weight. Draft off any thin ewes for preferential grazing.

Liver fluke

If you are sending cull ewes to the factory, make sure you get feedback on the status of the livers. Factory feedback is the gold standard in terms of identifying if sheep on your farm need to be treated for liver fluke. Don't miss this opportunity – ring the factory to ensure you receive the feedback.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, Athenry

PHILIP CREIGHTON, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on grass growth and performance.

After lower than normal grass growth rates in April and early May, growth has been consistently above 80kg DM/ha/day here in Athenry for late May and June. This has meant that we were able to harvest the majority of our silage requirements for the flocks by mid June, either from the planned main silage cut, which was harvested at the end of May in good conditions, or from surplus grass harvested to try to keep supply and demand in balance. This was challenging with consistently high growth rates but also very broken weather conditions, which delayed cutting of surplus grass at times.



We have topped or cut surplus bales from nearly all paddocks at this stage to remove stem and reset paddocks to improve quality for lambs post weaning. Lambs were weaned in late June at 14 weeks of age (100 days). Lamb performance to date (birth to 12 weeks) for the 11 ewes/ha groups averaged 262g/day, with lambs in the 13 ewes/ha groups averaging 255g/day. Lamb performance in the 0-5 week period was behind normal and this has affected subsequent lamb performance. Poor weather conditions and tight grass supplies during this time are likely to have contributed to this drop in performance. There is little difference between lambs grazing the grass or grass clover swards to date but clover proportion in the swards has been low due to the cold spring, averaging just 5% up to late May, although levels have increased in recent weeks.

Early lamb 2022

Easter Sunday falls on April 17, 2022, Ramadan begins on April 1. These are key dates that producers should keep in mind as they will drive demand for spring lamb next year. If considering sponging, then the sponges should be inserted for at least 12 days and not longer than 14 days.

On sponge removal an injection of PMSG (750iu for mating in July/early August) will help to boost litter size and improve conception rates. Ewes selected for early lamb production should be in good body condition (ideally 3.5 or greater) and should be weaned at least four weeks prior to sponging.



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 here and start listening:



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Growth and performance

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway looks at grass growth and lamb performance on the BETTER sheep farms.

Grass growth rates increased significantly on the lowland BETTER sheep farms towards the end of May and into June, which has allowed all flocks to cut silage and also led to further paddocks being dropped out of the grazing rotation for silage in order to maintain control over grass quality and supplies in front of the flocks. Grass growth rates for the group as of mid June were 68kg DM/ha, with demand averaging 40kg DM/ha, meaning a careful eye will have to be kept on grass across the farms to ensure grass quality is maintained in the run up to weaning and



beyond. Weaning will be taking place in late June/early July, at which point lambs will be given preferential access to grass grazing to 5.5-6cm with the ewes, once dried off, following behind them to clean out paddocks to 4cm.

The hill flocks in the programme carried out seven-week weights in June, with the mean performance of the lambs from the flocks weighed at time of writing presented in **Table 1**. Overall, lamb performance is behind where it was at this time in 2020, with growth rates for 2021 single lambs averaging 269g/day compared to over 280g/day for 2020. Single-rearing ewes and lambs and in some cases strong twin-rearing ewes and lambs will be put back to the hill from five to seven weeks of age, despite the temptation to keep ewes and lambs in with strong grass growth rates being reported for the 'green' ground.

Table 1: Lamb performance from four of the Teagasc BETTER hill sheep flocks from birth to seven weeks.

Birth type	Birth weight (kg)		Seven-week weight (kg)		Growth rate (g/day)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	4.4	4.0-5.0	17.6	16.1-18.7	269	233-300
2	3.8	3.4-4.2	14.8	12.6-17.6	222	180-278

Upcoming event

Peter and Tom McGuinness farm walk Sheep Grassland Farmer of the Year 2020

When: Wednesday, July 7 at 7.00pm

Where: Bellewstown, Trim, Co. Meath, C15 YE30

Selecting rams for breeding

July marks the start of the breeding sales. There are considerable advantages to buying replacement rams early. These include: 1) larger selection of rams to choose from; 2) ability to have the ram on your farm to acclimatise to new surroundings, diet, etc., before the breeding season; and, 3) ability to complete a full quarantine period to avoid bringing new

diseases/parasites into your flock. When selecting rams, where possible use the genetic evaluations to help you identify suitable rams. High genetic merit rams have consistently been shown to produce more profitable lambs and ewe replacements. They also produce lambs that have a lower carbon footprint. More information on performance recorded rams can be found on the Sheep Ireland website at: www.sheep.ie.

Parasites

Faecal egg counts for stomach worms have risen rapidly during June. When treating lambs for stomach worms ensure you get a faecal egg count done after drenching to ensure that the wormer is still working on your farm. Samples

should be taken either seven days (for levamisole-based products) or 14 days (for all other products) after the lambs have been treated. Discuss with your vet or advisor if you find you still have a positive egg count after treatment.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Farm Safety Week

July is the most dangerous month of the year, with the highest levels of farm workplace deaths based on past records. Let us change this trend in 2021. While many farming activities take place in July, tractor and machinery work and children on the farm are particular concerns. Farm Safety Week starts on Monday July 19 when the official launch occurs. Daily themes are as follows: Tuesday – Dying



to get the job done? Tiredness can kill; Wednesday – Farm safety may not cost the Earth but not doing it may cost you your life; Thursday – Protecting the public; and, Friday – Your health, your safety, your choice. Farm Safety Week is a collaboration between the farm safety partnerships of the UK (www.yellowwellies.org) and Ireland. The daily themes reflect the fact that safety to a large extent is within our own controls. Follow Farm Safety Week messages in the media. The hashtag for the week is #FarmSafetyWeek.

