

# SHEEP

October 2022

## Grassland management

Edited by  
**Michael Gottstein,**  
Head of Sheep Knowledge Transfer

October is the month that sets up the grass for the coming year. Decisions made during this and the following months will play a big role in how much grass will be available next spring. Start closing your grazing ground from early to mid October onwards. Continue to close your grazing

ground in the same rotation as you will be grazing it in the springtime. Don't be tempted to go back in for another grazing once ground has been closed off. The grass will be far more valuable in the springtime when ewes have lambs at foot.

## Lime

It is an ideal time to correct soil pH by spreading lime. Correcting soil pH will release nutrients that are locked up in the soil and improve the efficiency with which organic and chemical fertilisers are utilised by the soil.



## Liver fluke

If you have not received factory feedback on livers, then it is a good time to take a faecal sample from your ewes. A positive faecal sample indicates infection and that treatment is needed. At this time of year sheep grazing pastures where liver fluke are present are actively picking up liver fluke larvae. Consequently, any treatment needs to be effective against immature fluke.

## Stomach worms

It's the last chance of the year to do a drench test to find out what wormers are still effective on your farm. Ewe lambs being retained as replacements are ideal for this. The following is the procedure to be followed.

### DAY 1

1. Select 10-15 lambs and mark them.
2. Place the lambs in a clean pen and collect 10 faecal deposits.
3. Submit samples to a laboratory for testing.
4. Treat all lambs with the desired anthelmintic (ensure proper drenching procedure):
  - a. weigh the heaviest lambs in the group;
  - b. set the correct dose rate (dose to the heaviest lamb);

- c. calibrate the dosing gun to ensure it is delivering the correct amount; and,
- d. treat all lambs ensuring that they swallow the full dose.

**DAY 8** after treatment with yellow (LV) or **DAY 15** after treatment with a white (BZ) or clear (ML) drench:

1. Draft off the 10-15 lambs previously selected and marked.
  2. Place the lambs in a clean pen and collect 10 faecal deposits.
  3. Submit samples to a laboratory for testing.
- If the product is working correctly, you should see a reduction of at least 95% in the egg count.

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## Mating ewes

When do you mate your ewes? The appropriate time to mate your ewes will depend on your stocking rate and when you can expect to have adequate grass next spring. If you find that you have to supplement ewes and lambs post turnout due to grass shortages, you are lambing too early

(or not closing up in time in the autumn/winter). It makes no financial sense to lamb ewes a few weeks early and then to feed ewes and/or lambs with expensive concentrates due to grass shortages. If you find yourself in this situation, consider delaying lambing by two weeks.

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## Length of the mating season

How long is your mating season? The length of your mating season dictates the length of your lambing season.

Many sheep farmers are part-time, working off farm and maybe taking holidays to lamb ewes. The following is an option for farmers to consider if they wish to compact their lambing season.

1. Delay mating until ewes are cycling (mid

October for lowland breeds).

2. Turn out rams with ewes for five weeks (two cycles).
  3. Change the raddle after 17 days to identify repeats.
  4. If all ewes were cycling at ram turnout, almost 100% of the ewes will have been mated in the first cycle. Approximately 85% should be pregnant.
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5. Sell the ewes which repeated as in-lamb ewes after scanning.
6. Retain extra replacements annually to allow for the sale of repeat breeders.
7. Lambing will occur over a three-week period.
8. Subsequent grazing and health treatments will be simplified as there will be less of an age difference between the first- and last-born lambs.

**Note:** in the first year the number of ewes lambing in your flock will be down marginally by 7-10% (unless you have kept extra replacements). Don't be tempted to remove the rams after the first cycle. You need to keep rams with the ewes as an insurance policy in case something went wrong (e.g., ram infertility, ewes not cycling early). It is essential that rams are properly raddled for the entire mating period – we don't want any nasty surprises at scanning time.

## Raddle your rams

Use a raddle on your rams to guard against infertility. It is important that colours are changed at least every two weeks (ideally every week), so that the number of repeat ewes can be identified. There are a number of options available when it

comes to raddling rams, i.e., raddle paste (powder mixed with oil), raddle crayon, or harness and crayon. These are cheap and easy to apply. Start with the lighter colours first (yellow → orange → green → red → blue → black).

### BETTER FARM UPDATE

## Breeding

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry reports on breeding on the BETTER sheep farms.

The midseason flocks are just on the point of the breeding season. Flocks will begin joining rams between October 1 and 26, depending on desired lambing date. Ewes were checked in August and cull ewes removed, with thin ewes separated for preferential feeding in order to try and rebuild body condition. Ewes marked as thin that fail to regain condition prior to mating will be culled before rams are joined, as these ewes will most likely have an underlying condition and a high likelihood of being

problem ewes later in the year. Once joined, rams will be raddled and the colour changed frequently 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. Separating repeats and later-lambing ewes at housing time will reduce the risk of ewes being overfed in the run up to lambing and reduce feeding costs. Rams will remain with ewes for approximately five to six weeks. Leaving rams in longer than this can seem advantageous at this time of year to potentially increase pregnancy rates, but analysis of data on the lowland BETTER sheep flocks last year showed that this is not necessarily the case. Across five of the lowland flocks last year where sufficient rams were

joined with ewes and pre-mating ewe body condition score (BCS) was correct, the average scanning pregnancy rate was 96% (range 93-98%), with 90% of the in-lamb ewes giving

birth in the first three weeks of lambing. A compact lambing will reduce workload and costs at a time of year when both can be high on farms.

## RESEARCH UPDATE

### Mating underway for the 2023 season

FIONA MCGOVERN, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on mating of the INZAC Flock at Athenry.

Grass growing conditions have remained consistent since my last update. Average grass growth over the past few weeks has been 61kg DM/day with 26 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 400iu PMSG prior to artificial insemination, which is due to take place on October 5 and 12. All ewes have been weighed, body condition scored and divided into mating groups. We use approximately 30 rams across the flock for mating and 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 is carried out across all of our flock to ensure there is no interrelationship between ewes and rams at mating. Prior to mating rams receive 500g concentrates per head per day to ensure they reach a BCS target of 3.5-4.0 at mating. The remainder of the 2022 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.

