

SHEEP

August 2022

Grassland management

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The target is to have 20 grazing days ahead by the end of August.

Prioritise the best grass available on the farm to lambs and thinner ewes where body condition score (BCS) needs to be improved before breeding. Once lambs have been weaned for a few weeks, it can be more practical to graze the group of thin ewes along with a lamb group that are not being fed concentrates, in order to reduce the number of grazing groups. It's also important to focus on building grass

reserves for the autumn/winter grazing period. The target is to have 20 grazing days ahead by the end of August. When conditions are suitable, take the opportunity to apply any remaining chemical fertiliser as per the farm nutrient management plan. Studies have shown a drop off in the response to applied fertiliser in late August/early September, so get it out early for best results.

Minimising lameness

When carrying out the usual soundness for breeding checks on the ewe flock, take the opportunity to separate out any lame ewes. If you close a gate to separate the last batch of sheep to reach the handling yard, you will find the majority of lameness cases are in this group. Another practical step in identifying the lame sheep is to put the entire group

through a footbath. The mild discomfort felt when infected hooves come in contact with the footbath solution will make it easier to pick out the lame sheep. Consult with your vet to establish a treatment plan for this group and only reintroduce them to the main flock when fully cleared up. Ewes that fail to respond to treatment should be culled.

Preparing rams for mating season

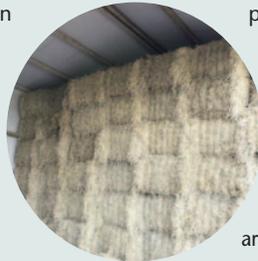
As rams can lose up to 15% body condition during mating, it is important to assess them in time and plan to build their body condition up to 3.5-4.0 at turnout. It may be necessary to supplement grass with a concentrate suitable for feeding to rams to achieve this target. Pay particular attention to any signs of ill health in your rams and deal with any issues such as lameness promptly. Any infection that causes even a slight temperature rise (as little as half a degree) can render a ram temporarily infertile.

Thoroughly inspect and check all the physical traits of any ram before purchasing a replacement. The other valuable information to consider before purchase are the Sheep Ireland Eurostar ratings. A ram intended as a terminal sire with high terminal index figures should have lower lambing difficulty and progeny that will grow faster, ultimately being ready for slaughter quicker. If you choose a high-index ram to breed replacements from, you can expect daughters with lower mortality and higher litter sizes.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Take care with machinery

August is harvest month with a lot of machinery movement on farms and on public roads, including trailers, balers and silage gear. Machinery movement brings danger, particularly to bystanders including children and older farmers. A vehicle travelling at a walking speed of 5km/hour travels at 1.4 metres per second. Being struck by a machine causes bystander deaths and injuries due to the impact



force. In August also, a lot of use is made of powered machines, so make sure moving parts are guarded. This applies particularly to machines used in a stationary position, like augers and slurry tanker drive shafts. Entanglement in a machine moving part leads to horrific injuries. Children are 'out and about' in August enjoying the summer before the return to school, so continued farm safety measures are necessary.



UPCOMING EVENT

The annual Sheep Ireland LambPlus Elite Multi-Breed EuroStar Ram Sale 2022 takes place on **Saturday, August 27 in Tullamore Mart, Co. Offaly, with the sale starting at 11.30am.** Over 350 rams are expected to be on offer and all entries will be five-star on the replacement and/or terminal index, as well as being genotyped and sire verified.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Grass quality challenges

FRANK CAMPION, of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre reports on performance and management on the BETTER sheep farms.

All of the lowland flocks' lambs have been weaned since late June/early July, and at this stage the summer grazing rotation is in full swing, with lambs grazing out paddocks to approximately 6cm and ewes following behind them. The performance to weaning across the flocks this year was for the most part behind previous years. Reasons for this vary somewhat between the farms, but the challenge of managing grass quality at times between the seven-week weights and weaning is one key reason behind this on some of the farms. The weaning weights and average daily gain (ADG) for the group are presented in **Table 1**. A key performance metric the farms are looking at, apart from average performance, is the proportion of lambs that are either less than

25kg, 25-30kg, 30-35kg and 35kg+. While all flocks will have lambs that are less than 25kg or 25-30kg, it's the proportion of these that's important and will have an influence on management decisions for finishing lambs, with the higher-performing flocks having >50% of lambs over 30kg at weaning. Where farms are behind target with their lamb weights, some have established 'finishing groups' where lambs >35kg liveweight are being managed as a separate group, and receiving 300-500g of concentrates/head/day. This will speed up the drafting rate, while also controlling costs by only targeting concentrates at lambs for a short period prior to finishing, while the lighter lambs are allowed to grow further on grass.

Table 1: Lamb performance from the Teagasc BETTER lowland sheep flocks from birth to 14 weeks (weaning).

Birth type	Growth rate (g/day)		14-week weight (kg)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	295	230-353	35.1	28.3-41.4
2	255	202-285	30.1	24.8-33.3
3+	260	245-279	30.4	28.4-32.5

RESEARCH UPDATE

Lambs thriving in good conditions



FIONA MCGOVERN, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the latest from the INZAC and breeding flocks farmed there.

Grass growing conditions are at an optimum for the time of year here in Athenry. Grass growth is currently 60kg DM/ha, with a demand of 35kg DM/ha. All lambs in the INZAC flock were weaned on June 13, at approximately 98 days of age. As part of INZAC phase II, we have a fourth treatment group of New Zealand x high Irish animals. Average weaning weights for the four groups were 30.3kg (New Zealand), 29.8kg (high Irish), 26.6kg (low Irish), and 31.2kg (NZ x high Irish).

As we go to print, lambs are currently averaging 38kg liveweight with a growth rate of 230g/day in the month post weaning. All lambs in our flock are ultrasound scanned for backfat and muscle depth as part of the Sheep Ireland programme. The first group of lambs have been drafted and sent for slaughter. We are continuing to monitor the faecal egg counts (FECs) of lambs. It is important to regularly monitor this to avoid unnecessary treatment. As part of the OviFEC project, which is looking at the genetic potential to breed for resistance to gastrointestinal nematodes, all of our lambs have been individually faecal sampled once pre weaning and will be faecal sampled again once their group average FEC count goes above 600epg. This will

allow us to determine the response to drenching among our lambs. All lambs receive a cobalt drench fortnightly at weighing. At this point, all ewes have been thoroughly examined and cross checked against lambing records in order to make culling decisions and to avoid holding onto problem ewes within the flock. At weaning ewe BCS was lower than we've seen in previous years, so we are monitoring this currently and ensuring ewes have access to good quality grass in the run up to mating. Ideally, we would like our ewe BCS to be 3.5 on average at mating, which for us is the beginning of October.



A BCS of 3.5 is being targeted for mating.