

SHEEP

November 2023

Grassland management

The aim for November is to continue to clean off pastures to a cover of 3.5-4.0cm. This allows light to get to base of the grass plant, thus encouraging tillering and ensuring high-quality spring pastures. In particular, if you are dealing with heavy covers, allocating three- to four-day blocks using temporary fencing is advised. You can achieve the desired residual

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cover while limiting any negative impact on ewe reproductive performance. As a high proportion of winter grass growth generally takes place in October and November, resist the temptation to regrazed paddocks that have already been closed. This grass will be worth far more to you for ewes and lambs next spring.

Keep a close eye on mating

Monitor the progress of mating closely and continue with the important task of raddling the ram to the end of mating period. It is good practice to change raddle colour weekly for the first three weeks of mating. Watch out for over marking of repeats after the first cycle to pick up any ram infertility/subfertility issues. There is potential to join groups of ewes up at this stage, as less ram power will be required to cover any repeats. Where practical joining a group of at least three rams will reduce the risk of infertility issues with individual rams. Creating

bigger groups also helps get swards grazed out quicker and reduces the number of groups of sheep, making it easier to close up paddocks. Remove any ram where you suspect a fertility problem, as well as rams with any physical issue. Ram lambs could also be rested after about three weeks of mating 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.

Liver fluke

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) issues a fluke forecast annually, usually in late November, based on weather data for the year as well as information from slaughter plants. There have been some reports of factory feedback indicating the presence of liver fluke in slaughtered lambs and cull ewes. If this feedback can be obtained from abattoirs it is the best indicator of where your farm is at in

relation to liver fluke infection. In treating for liver fluke, the critical thing to get right is using a product that kills the stage of fluke that is likely to be present – immature fluke at this time of year. Flukicides containing triclabendazole target all stages of fluke but there are well-documented resistance issues. If unsure seek veterinary advice to devise a farm specific control programme.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Be winter ready

Preparation is key to minimise disruption to farming activities during severe weather events. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has developed a practical checklist for farms, which outlines key issues when planning for, and in response to, severe weather events this winter. The more significant issues involve planning for:

- provision of feed and water to livestock;
- delivery of feed to farms and the transport of products from farms;
- freezing of water pipes to sheds and outdoor water troughs;
- freezing of milking machines and other equipment in milking parlours;
- freezing of coolant and diesel in tractors;
- damage to forage crops being grazed in-situ or stored in farmyards; and,
- personal risks of working and driving during severe weather conditions, e.g., ice.



For more information visit:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9e1358-preparing-your-business-for-severe-weather-stay-winter-ready/>.

Chainsaw safety

Chainsaw injuries involve cuts and lacerations to the limbs, neck, head and trunk. The major cause of timber-related fatal accidents is being struck by falling trees or branches while they are being felled. Appropriate training in chainsaw use and the wearing of suitable protective clothing to protect against these injuries is essential.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM), Martin Heydon TD, recently launched a video focused on safety with chainsaws, which was produced by Teagasc in association with FBD and the Farm Safety Partnership. View the video at the following link: <https://youtu.be/9W4zrNL6o-w>.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Ewe performance

FRANK CAMPION, of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry reports on mating liveweights and BCS on the BETTER sheep farms.

Mating liveweights and body condition scores (BCSs) for the mature ewes from the lowland BETTER farm sheep flocks are presented in **Table 1**. Mature ewe BCS is mixed across the flocks with some of the farms hitting their target of 3.5, and some coming close to it. A couple of the flocks' ewes are thinner than they would have wanted at mating time for various reasons, including flock health. Looking across the flocks with the lower BCSs there is a large degree of variation within some of these flocks. While the ship has sailed for getting animals in good BCS for mating, it will be important that care is taken with these thinner ewes up to and after lambing.

Some flocks will have culled a number of these thin ewes prior to letting out the ram, but where there is a significant number of thin animals this is not always an option. The thin ewes remaining will be re-checked to ensure issues, such as broken mouth, were not missed



Mature ewe BCS is mixed across the flocks.

in earlier checks that may prevent them putting on BCS. These ewes may then need to be housed earlier than the rest of the flock and given preferential treatment during the winter feeding period.

All of the flocks are following an autumn closing plan and aim to have 20% of the farm closed by the end of October, with a further 20% (40% in total) closed by mid November. The hill flocks will be joining rams with ewes this month and similarly to the lowland flocks, ewes will be weighed and condition scored prior to joining.

Table 1: Mature ewe liveweight and BCS at mating on the lowland BETTER farm sheep flocks 2023.

Flock	Galway	Carlow	Wicklow	Kerry	Galway
Mean liveweight (kg)	79.0	76.4	61.2	76.6	68.3
Mean BCS	3.3	3.2	3.0	3.5	3.6

RESEARCH UPDATE

Lamb performance

PHILIP CREIGHTON, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lamb performance across the groups on the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

Rams were turned out to ewes on October 6. Ewe BCS going to the ram averaged 3.2. The average replacement rate across the groups this year was 27%. Up to mid October, approximately 65% of lambs from the grass-only treatments and 75% of lambs from the grass plus white clover and grass plus white clover plus plantain treatments had been drafted. This includes lambs finished from their main forage treatments plus some

lambs that were removed and finished on the hybrid brassica forage crop, as mentioned in our last update.

The average liveweight of the remaining lambs is 38.7kg and these have now been moved onto the forage crop for finishing. The aim is to eliminate the need for concentrate supplementation to finish these lambs, as would have been the case in previous years, especially in a challenging year like this for lamb performance. Closing of paddocks commenced in mid October to build grass for next spring. The plan is to have approximately 20% of each farmlot 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.



They are heading towards closing at the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.