

# SHEEP

August 2023

## Grassland management

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At this time of year most grass species are back in a reproductive phase, and will not be heading out, which allows high quality autumn covers to be built up. The response to fertiliser generally declines in late August/early

September, so get out early for best results. Aim to apply the last round of chemical fertiliser early in August once conditions are suitable. Ensure you stay within the limits of the farm nutrient management plan.

### Focus on body condition score

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 score (BCS) 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. The thinner ewes in your flock need to be separated and given access to high quality grass from at least early August if intended for mating in early to mid October. The remaining ewes that are in good body condition can be grazed as a follower group after finishing lambs or the thin ewe group. As previously outlined in this publication, the

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) regional veterinary laboratories, in association with Teagasc, are carrying out a thin ewe study focusing on identifying the causes of poor BCS in Irish sheep flocks. Of the ewes that fail to regain body condition, consider submitting three thin ewes to a Regional Veterinary Laboratory for euthanasia and post mortem. It provides a cost-effective method of screening your flock for the presence of the so-called iceberg diseases. For further information contact your local Teagasc advisor, veterinary surgeon or your nearest DAFM Regional Veterinary Laboratory.

## Flock biosecurity for incoming sheep



*Plan practical steps to be taken with incoming sheep to protect flock health.*

Each year August brings a lot of movement of breeding stock and store lambs between farms. The risk of buying in animals carrying infectious disease or resistant parasites should not be underestimated. A closed flock, where only rams are purchased, significantly reduces this risk but it is important to

be aware that sheep taken home unsold from market or those returning from shows can potentially bring back disease to the farm. Consult with your veterinary practitioner to come up with a set of practical steps to be taken with incoming sheep, with the aim of not introducing any new health issues to the flock.

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## Upcoming events

### **LOWLAND SHEEP WALK – AUGUST 23:**

farm of Des Powell, Templederry, Co. Tipperary E45 AY99

– *Focus on preparing for breeding.*

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### **HILL SHEEP WALK – AUGUST 24:**

farm of Paul Boyle, Tymeen, Letterbarrow, Co. Donegal

– *Focus on store lamb options and preparing for breeding.*

Both events will be signposted locally.

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### **SHEEP IRELAND €UROSTAR MULTI-BREED RAM SALE**

Saturday, August 26 at 11.30am in Tullamore Mart.

See <https://www.sheep.ie/> for more details, as well as dates for breed society sales.

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## BETTER FARM UPDATE

## Weaning early a good move

Frank Champion of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on how early weaning worked well on some of the BETTER sheep farms.

As mentioned in the July update, some of the flocks took the decision to wean lambs off the ewes a couple of weeks earlier than planned in order to reduce overall grass demand on the farm and ensure the best grass was kept for the lambs.

This turned out to be a good move for most of the flocks as weather conditions had restricted grass growth rates and it took a couple of weeks after the dry weather conditions for rates to return to normal. The performance of lambs from birth to weaning and from the seven-week weights to weaning are presented in **Table 1**. Lamb performance was behind target for most up to seven weeks but recovered somewhat from seven to 14 weeks. Lamb growth rates from seven to 14 weeks were ahead of where they were last year, meaning the average weaning weight for most of the flocks was on par with last year. There are a couple of potential reasons for this, including what appears to be better

quality grass swards during this period as there was no significant explosion of grass growth, and lower-stocked flocks found it easier to maintain grass quality in late May/early June. Also, typically during this period lambs would experience an internal parasite challenge from strongyles, but the dry weather conditions kept this burden lower than normal, which benefited lamb performance.

Currently, grass growth rates on the farms are exceeding demand and the days ahead are increasing for some of the flocks. This will present a significant challenge in the coming weeks to re-establish a good grazing rotation, while also maintaining grass quality and lamb performance following the dry conditions and the wet period that came after that. It will be very important in the next few weeks that lambs are not forced to graze heavy or poor quality covers so that lamb performance is maintained.

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

Birth type	ADG 7-14 weeks (g/day)		ADG 0-14 weeks (g/day)		14-week weight (kg)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	257	194-371	281	235-331	33.3	28.6-38.3
2	219	174-265	241	195-282	28.6	23.6-33.1
3+	221	156-267	242	216-277	28.2	25.5-31.4

## RESEARCH UPDATE

### Weather brings challenges

PHILIP CREIGHTON, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on weaning and grass growth at the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

Lambs were weaned in mid June at 14 weeks of age (100 days). Lamb performance averaged 252g/head/day for the lambs on the grass-only treatments. Lambs on the grass plus white clover or plantain treatments averaged 255g/day. Lamb performance up to six weeks of age was well behind normal due to the challenging weather conditions in late March and April (average daily gain of 267g/head/day), and this lost performance was not regained prior to weaning, resulting in weaning weights being 1.5-2kg behind normal. Grass growth in May, June and July to date

averaged 91, 50 and 57kg DM/ha/day, respectively, with an average of 65kg nitrogen (N) spread/ha on grazing ground up to mid July. The good growing conditions in May allowed us to harvest our main crop of silage at the end of May in good conditions, and we were able to take out some surplus grass also where required to maintain grass quality. We have now met our winter feed requirements and have a small surplus built up. We have been monitoring faecal egg counts since mid May, and recorded a spike in strongyle counts in late June following the end of the dry spell.



## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Funding for PTO covers and ATV helmets



Funding is now available under the new National Farm Safety Measure to cover 60% of the eligible cost of up to two quad bike (ATV) helmets and four

power take off (PTO) shaft covers.

A total of €1.5m has been allocated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) to support farmers in the purchase of this equipment. The grant aid is subject to a maximum eligible cost of €100 per PTO shaft cover and €150 per quad bike helmet.

Only ATV/quad helmets and PTO covers that meet the scheme specifications are eligible.

Check carefully before purchase. Applications can

be made until September 29 using your agfood.ie online account. To learn more contact your local Teagasc office. August is part of the summer school holiday period. Ensure children are supervised while on the farm.

Autumn-calving herds can be very busy during August. Always take time to identify the temperament of the cow/heifer before assisting. Calving gates help by providing a physical barrier to protect you. Take time to use them. Farm vehicles and machinery are very busy during August. Always ensure moving parts on machines are guarded and vehicles are driven safely. Scan the QR code with your smartphone to see a video on harvest safety.

