

# SHEEP

March 2024

## Grassland

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*Farms that closed early tend to have good opening covers.*

Reports suggest good opening covers on farms that closed early, with lower covers on those that didn't. Pre-grazing covers for March should be 1,000-1,200kg DM/ha (7-8cm). Graze these down to 3.5cm in the first round. Once grass height goes below 4cm ewes are no longer able to meet daily intake requirements and require supplementation. Early March-lambing flocks should have 60% of the farm grazed by the start of April, with the first rotation finished by mid April. Getting a grazing rotation established early will allow for faster regrowth in closed paddocks, build covers for the start of the second rotation and improve sward quality.



## LAMBS

should receive

**50**ml

of colostrum per  
kg within the first  
six hours of life.

### Fertiliser

For those spreading fertiliser, the first round should be protected urea. Apply from 15-25kg nitrogen (N)/ha (one-third to half a bag per acre) depending on demand once conditions are suitable:

- soil temperature: minimum 6°C and rising is required for growth;
- do not spread on wet soils as there is

possible N loss and soil damage – ensure heavy rainfall is not forecast at least 48 hours after application; and,

- target fields with high perennial ryegrass content and those with covers >500kg DM/ha (5cm). Where available, target slurry or farmyard manure (FYM) on fields with lower grass covers.

## Colostrum

Adequate colostrum intake is the best way to improve lamb survival and performance. Colostrum serves three main functions: dense source of energy/nutrients; source of maternally derived antibodies for lambs' passive immunity; and, as a laxative to help clean the digestive tract.

Ensure any lambs that need help suckling get enough feed. Lambs should receive 50ml per kg within the first six hours of life, combining to 200ml per kg within the first 24 hours. See **Table 1** for guideline amounts.

### Colostrum alternatives

Where there is insufficient colostrum one of these alternative option will be necessary:

- another freshly lambled ewe;



*Lambs need to get enough colostrum.*

- cow colostrum (from two or more cows plus a 20% higher feed rate); or,
- proprietary brands – follow manufacturer's instructions.

Ensure each lamb receives some of its own mother's colostrum or that of another freshly lambled ewe in the flock. Pool ewes' colostrum and top it up with an alternative to facilitate transfer of passive immunity.

**Table 1: Colostrum feeding rates for newborn lambs.**

Birth type	Birth weight (kg)	First feed	First 24 hours
Single	6	300ml	1,200ml
Twin	5	250ml	1,000ml
Triplet	4	200ml	800ml



## Lambing coming fast

FRANK CAMPION of Teagasc AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway looks at lambing and scanning on the BETTER farms.

On the lowland farms, they are preparing for lambing. Farmers are ensuring there are enough lambing pens, group pens, supplies, etc., and assessing grass supplies and planning for turn out. Grass supplies are on track; however, ground conditions are wet on most farms and no fertiliser has been spread. The first round will go out once weather and ground conditions allow (15-25kg N/ha protected urea).

### Varying scan rates

The BETTER hill sheep farms pregnancy scanned in February. **Table 2** shows results from three flocks. Pregnancy rates vary and in some flocks are below target (>90%).

Discussion and investigation will take place soon to ensure that problems can be identified for mating this year.

At time of writing, the hill ewes are being condition scored. For those that spent winter on the hill, BCS has slipped. Target average hill flock ewe BCS is 3.0, with as few ewes as possible <2.5. Where possible, thinner ewes will remain down until lambing and receive supplementation to try to maintain BCS.



*Pregnancy rates are low on some of the hill farms.*

**Table 2: Pregnancy scanning results from the BETTER farm hill sheep flocks.**

Location	Donegal	Galway	Wicklow
Scanned litter size	1.28	1.29	1.55
Scanned pregnancy rate	68.8	72.4	89.2
Scanning rate	0.88	0.93	1.38

## Hygiene

Keep pens and lambing areas clean and dry to reduce the newborns' infection exposure. Use lime or other disinfectants. Straw shortages are affecting farms, so consider alternatives such as sawdust/

wood shavings. All items used during birth, feeding or handling, and your own clothing, can be infection sources. Keep work gear clean, use gloves when assisting lambing, and sterilise equipment.



## Scanning and growth

## RESEARCH UPDATE

PHILIP CREIGHTON of Teagasc AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the latest from the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

Ewes were scanned in early January, and overall scan rate is 1.87 lambs per ewe. Barren rate was 7%, which is higher than usual. Singles, twins and triplets are 22%, 53% and 19%, respectively. Lambing is due to start on March 1. Ewes are in good body condition score (BCS), averaging 3.2 at scanning, and are now being offered grass silage (75 DMD, 14% crude protein (CP)). They have been grouped by litter size and lambing date, and are being offered concentrates (Table 3).

### Grass growth over winter

Over winter grass growth has been low. Due to poor weather, no N has been applied to date (mid February). Once ground conditions improve and soil



fertiliser will be spread when weather and ground allow. temperatures remain suitable, N will be applied (protected urea – approximately 19kg N/ha) anywhere with a grass cover above 5cm. Average farm cover was around 550kg/ha across the farm in mid February, which is low. Hopefully as ground dries and we get fertiliser out, we will close the gap to our target opening cover (~650-700kg DM/ha). We will monitor the situation and supplement to make up any shortfall.

Table 3: Concentrates per ewe per day prior to lambing (kg/ewe/day).

	Weeks pre lambing				Total (kg)
	7	6-5	4-3	2-1	
	Concentrates (kg/ewe/day)				
Singles	-	-	0.3	0.5	11
Twins	-	0.35	0.55	0.8	24
Triplets	0.3	0.40	0.80	1.1	34