

SHEEP

November 2024

We need your views on labour



Teagasc is conducting a major study around labour on sheep farms.

There are many aspects of sheep farming that require hard graft, but equally there are opportunities to significantly reduce the labour involved in managing a sheep flock. With more and more sheep farms being managed on a part-time basis, labour efficiency is more than ever a critical element of future-proofing our sheep industry. Teagasc is conducting a major study around labour on sheep farms, and reaching out to sheep farmers for assistance. The study aims to identify the major labour issues sheep farmers encounter, as well as highlight the areas where labour-saving improvements can be made.

Please scan the QR code or use the following link: <https://bit.ly/47yLo23> to complete this anonymous survey. It will be 10-15 minutes well spent.



EDITED BY
DAMIAN COSTELLO,
SHEEP SPECIALIST



TAKE TEAGASC'S
10-15-minute
survey to help
inform a major
study around labour
on sheep farms.

Grassland management

The aim for November is to continue to clean off pastures to a cover of 3.5-4.0cm. If you are dealing with heavy covers, allocating three- to four-day blocks using temporary fencing is good practice. It may also be an option to merge mating groups after the first cycle, aiming to get paddocks grazed out quicker while limiting any negative impact on ewe reproductive performance. Once closed, paddocks should remain closed, as a high proportion of



Once closed, keep paddocks closed until spring.

winter grass growth generally takes place in October and November. Check out the closing plan for the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm, which is outlined later in this bulletin in the Research Update.

Weight and BCS at mating

FRANK CAMPION of Teagasc's Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre (AGRIC) looks at ewe liveweights and BCS at mating across the lowland BETTER sheep farms.

Ewe liveweight and body condition score (BCS) at mating time is presented in Table 1. The results are mixed, with some of the flocks on target (average 3.5, under 10% <BCS 3.0), while others are below these targets. It will be important that care is taken with the thinner ewes in flocks up to and after lambing. Some

farms will have culled a portion of their thin ewes prior to letting out the ram, but where thin ewe numbers are high this is not always an option. These thinner ewes may then need to be housed earlier than the rest of the flock and given preferential treatment during the winter feeding period.

Table 1: Mature ewe liveweight and BCS at mating on seven of the lowland Teagasc BETTER farm sheep flocks 2024.

Flock	Monaghan	Galway	Carlow	Offaly	Wexford	Roscommon	Wicklow
Mean liveweight (kg)	68.6	82.8	77.8	70.0	73.1	71.1	67.2
Mean BCS	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.2
Percentage <3.0	26	17	2	36	25	1	15

BETTER FARM
UPDATE

Monitor breeding progress

Last month's publication advised on raddling the ram. It is important to follow this task through to the end of the breeding season. After the first cycle, watch closely for over marking of the initial raddle mark – 15% or more of repeats are indicative of ram infertility/sub-fertility issues. There is potential to join groups of ewes up at this stage, as generally less ram power will be required to cover repeats. Remove any ram where you suspect a fertility problem, as well as rams with any physical issue. Ram lambs should ideally be rested after about three weeks of



Remove any ram where you suspect a fertility problem.

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.

Be winter ready

It is very important to think about how severe weather might impact your work and take action to mitigate this. The Irish Government's Be Winter Ready campaign focuses on helpful ways to minimise disruption to farming activities during severe weather events.

During severe weather, tasks like milking, provision of feed and water to livestock,

delivery of feed to the farm or products from the farm, can become very difficult. Planning and preparation will help to minimise disruption. For more information visit: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9e1358-preparing-your-business-for-severe-weather-stay-winter-ready/>.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Liver fluke

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) issues an annual liver fluke forecast, usually in late November, based on weather records for the year, as well as information coming from slaughter plants. If unsure on appropriate fluke treatment, seek veterinary advice to devise a farm-specific control programme.

When treating sheep for liver fluke, please follow the DAFM guidelines below to help prevent flukicide residues in carcasses:

- protect food safety, public health and animal health by using medicines properly;
- read product literature regarding dose rates and meat withdrawal periods;

- shake bottle well before use;
- do not treat animals who are nearing slaughter;
- use correct dose – weigh animals accurately;
- it is a legal requirement to pass on

- information to buyers at sale time regarding treatments; and,
- report adverse drug reactions to your vet or on the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) website.

Mating and closing

PHILIP CREIGHTON of AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on mating, forage crops and closing on the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

Rams were turned out to ewes on October 11. Ewe BCS going to the ram averaged 3.4, which is up nearly 0.25 of a condition score on last year. Up to mid October, approximately 76% of lambs from the grass-only, 80% of lambs from the grass plus white clover, and 87% of lambs from grass plus white clover plus plantain treatments had been drafted. This includes lambs finished from their main forage treatments plus some lambs which were removed and finished on the hybrid brassica forage crop since mid September.

Liveweight

Average liveweight of remaining lambs is 41.2kg. Based on forage crop availability, approximately half of these lambs will be finished off the forage crop and the remaining lambs will be housed for finishing, which will represent 5-10% of lambs, depending on grazing treatment. The aim of incorporating the forage crop

RESEARCH UPDATE



Closing of paddocks commenced in mid October.

into our system is to reduce the need for concentrate supplementation to finish 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, 80% by mid December, and the remainder by late December/early January.