BETTER Farm update January 2023

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All of the lowland flocks have ewes housed at this stage with most housing pre-Christmas. Careful attention is being paid to ewe BCS since housing with some flocks having a higher than desired level of thin ewes at mating and with the comparatively wet conditions during mating making grass utilisation difficult some felt BCS slipped during this time. Ewes were assessed for BCS at housing and anytime they have been handled since (vaccination, scanning etc.) Thin ewes (less than BCS 3.0) are being given preferential treatment (e.g. thin singles being penned with twins). It is important to prevent excess BCS loss in the run up to lambing to ensure ewes have sufficient body reserves in early lactation.

Results from silage analysis from the farms is being completed at time of writing and the results to date are summarised in Table 1. Dry matter percentage is ahead of last year on average by 3.5% with DMD up by 2% on 2021. However, aside from this the figures are relatively similar to 2021. Different batches of silage bales were marked during the summer so the best quality silage could be identified for feeding in the final 6-8 weeks pre-lambing and most flocks have sufficient quantities of 70 DMD and greater available for late pregnancy feeding. The forage analysis will be used when developing the concentrate feeding plan for the flocks in run up to lambing with the flocks with silage in excess of 75% DMD being able to feed singles only soya pre-lambing and will only introduce concentrates to twins from 4 weeks out. However, these low concentrate feeding levels require excellent feed and flock management to be successful.

Table 1. Results to date from silage quality tests on baled silage on the BETTER sheep farms

	2022 Mean	Min	Max	2021 Mean	Diff
DM (%)	37.1	20.7	60.7	33.5	3.5
PH	4.6	4	5.74	4.6	0.0
NH3	5.9	1.5	18.1	6.7	-0.8
Protein (% DM)	14.0	8.9	17.8	13.6	0.4
ME (Mj/kg DM)	10.6	9.97	11.7	10.2	0.5
DMD (% DM)	72.9	60.2	79.65	70.8	2.1