



Hill Sheep Farm Walk

August 24th 2023

Farm of Paul Boyle

Bruckless, Co. Donegal



Farm Details

Farm layout:

- Privately owned hill
- Rented enclosed hill grazing
- Shared commonage grazing
- Green ground for hill flock
- Lowland block for lowland flock

Hill Ewe flock:

- 90 hill ewes + replacements
 - SBF ewes – Perth/Lanark ewe type
- Ewe flock out wintered on the hill
- Lambing from 15th April onwards

Farm Plan

Ewe numbers – 90+ ewes

Scan rate target - > 1.3 lambs per ewe joined

Weaning rate target - > 1.0 lambs per ewe joined

Breeding Plan

- Build numbers from within as much as possible
 - Close flock once numbers are stabilised

Flock Management

- 6 Ha of 'green ground' assigned to hill flock
- Graze ewes on hill for 9 months of the year
- Move to outdoor lambing for hill ewes over next couple of years
- Reduce variable costs for hill ewes
 - Will be largely achieved by using hill for longer and lambing outdoors

Flock Performance

Table 1. Performance of the mature ewes in the mid-season flock for 2022 & 2023

	2022	2023
Hill ewes joined	43	81
Litter size	88	88
Ewes lambed (%)	1.4	1.4
Lambs reared per ewe joined	1.0	1.0

- Flock bred to Scottish Blackface & Terminal rams
 - Poorer performing ewes to Terminal rams
- Ewe numbers have increased to 90
 - Plan to hold at this for now
 - Workload and farm location important factors
- Pregnancy rate and litter size have remained the same despite increase in numbers

Table 2. Lamb performance to date for lambs reared by mature ewes.

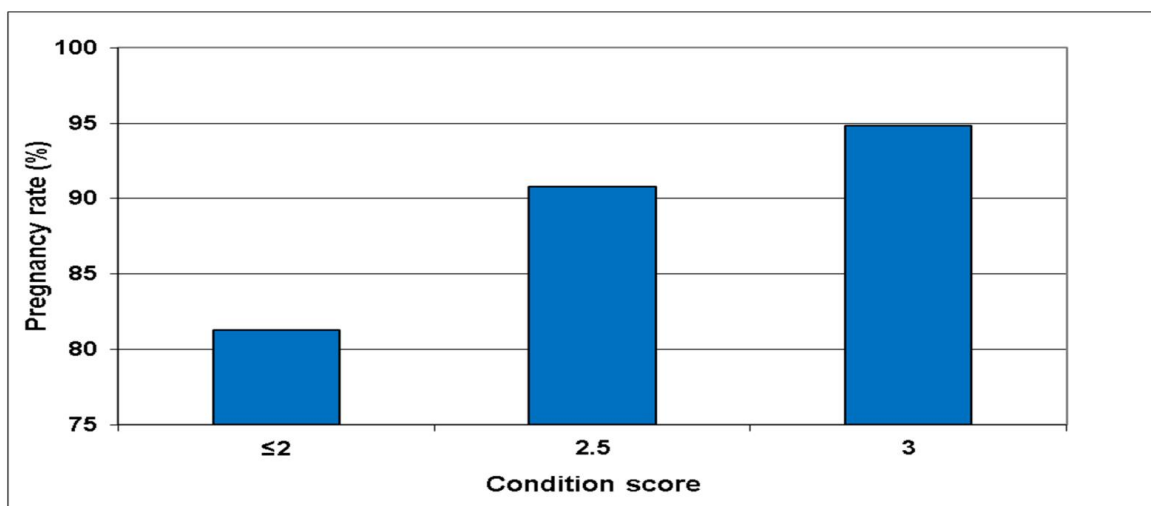
Litter Size	Birth Wt. (kg)	14 Week Weight (kg)	ADG 0-14 weeks (g/day)
Singles	4.7	23.3	190
Twins	4.5	22.0	177

Table 3. Breakdown of hill lamb weaning weights 2023 (%)

Category	%
<25 kg	35
25–30 kg	38
30–35 kg	22
>35 kg	5

Hill Ewe Productivity

Improve mating BCS – improved pregnancy rates



As much variation within breed as between breeds:
focus on improving within breed performance

	Birth Weight (kg)	Weaning Weight (kg)	ADG Birth to Weaning (g/day)
Dingle Scotch	5.2	23.2	184
Lanark	5.1	22.4	176
Swaledale	5.2	23.1	183



Ewe BCS

- BCS is the most accessible tool to assess and manage flock nutritional status
- Increasing BCS will increase pregnancy rate on hill flocks
 - More ewes in lamb = more sales
- Focus attention on under conditioned ewes within the flock
 - Target < 10% less than BCS 2.5 at mating
- Regular ewe BCS assessment and management should start 2-3 weeks after weaning and run right through until after lambing

Boyle Hill Ewe BCS from 2020, 2021 & 2022

	2020	2021	2022
Average ewe live weight (kg)	54.2	53.8	54.7
Average ewe BCS	3.0	3.0	2.8
% < 2.5	0	0	10



Finishing Options for Hill Lambs

1. Sell as stores at weaning
2. Finish after weaning on ad-lib concentrates
3. Graze until heavier and finish on concentrates
4. Graze lambs on and sell as stores later in the year
5. Finish as 'light lambs' @ 12-16kg carcass weight

Targets

- Maximise cheap gain at **grazed grass**
- Target **33kg** live weight at housing
- Average growth rates of **330 and 220 grams/day** between Texel crosses and hill breeds, respectively
- Aim to keep **mortality <3%**
- Aiming to produce a **18kg + carcass** suitable for 'French' spec products

Indoor Finishing Period

- House animals in **groups by weight**
- Allow at least **12 days acclimatisation** to new diet to prevent digestive upsets
- Building **from 250g/day** on day 1 by 100g each day until ad-lib feeding is reached
- Offer **100g dry matter of roughage** per day throughout the ad lib period
- Shearing will **aid in management** aspects but no added performance benefits
- **Fresh water** supply
- **Good husbandry essential**

'Light' Lamb Finishing

- Potential markets for 'light lambs' developing
- Agreement with processor needed prior to sale
- Lambs for this system selected for slaughter once:
 - Ram lambs >34 kg live weight with a fat cover
 - Castrate lambs >33 kg live weight with a fat cover
- Target carcass weights 12kg – 16kg
- Target grade of R with minimum fat cover of 2

	Indoor		Outdoors	
	Rams	Castrates	Rams	Castrates
Starting Live Wt (kg)	23.0	23.4	23.3	24
Finished Live Wt (kg)	35.6	34.3	35	34.4
ADG (g/day)	205	173	144	103
Carcass Wt (kg)	14.9	14.9	14.8	15.1
Carcass confirmation	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
Fat Score	2.8	2.9	2.7	2.7
KO%	42	44	42	43