

SHEEP

August 2020

Grassland management

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Grass growth rates have recovered well during July and now it's important to focus on building grass reserves for the autumn/winter grazing period. By this time of year most grass species are back in a reproductive phase and will not tend to be heading out. This allows for highly digestible leafy grass covers to be built up. The

target is to have 20 grazing days ahead by the end of August. When conditions are suitable take the opportunity to apply any remaining chemical fertiliser as per the farm nutrient management plan. Studies have shown a drop off in the response to applied fertiliser in late August/early September so get out early for best results.

Ewe body condition

Managing body condition of the ewe flock now will impact next season's lamb crop. The starting point is putting your ewes through a race and handling each ewe to assess body condition. The thinner ewes in your flock need to be grouped and also given access to high-quality grass from early August if intended for mating in early October. For the average lowland ewe to go from body condition score (BCS) 2.5 up to 3.5, she needs to gain in the order of 10-12kg bodyweight. This is why allowing enough time to build body condition is critical. Ewes that fail to regain body condition after preferential grazing treatment should be culled, as it is an indication of an underlying issue.

Lameness

When carrying out the usual soundness for breeding checks on the ewe flock, take the opportunity to separate out any lame ewes. Consult with your vet to establish a treatment plan for this group and only reintroduce them to the main flock when fully cleared up. If you close a gate to separate the last batch of sheep to reach the handling yard you will find the majority of lameness cases are in this group. Another practical step in identifying the lame sheep is to put the entire group through a footbath. The mild discomfort felt when infected hooves come in contact with the footbath solution will make it easier to pick out the lame sheep.

Biosecurity for bought-in stock

The risk of buying in animals carrying infectious diseases or resistant parasites should not be underestimated. Typically, August is a month when rams, hoggets and store lambs

come onto the farm. If you don't currently have any flock health issues, the last thing you want to do is buy in a problem. Talk to your vet or advisor to discuss a protocol for dealing with any new stock coming onto the farm.

Upcoming events

Let's Talk Cattle & Sheep is a series of fortnightly webinars on Wednesday evenings at 6.30pm for Irish beef and sheep farmers. Join us for timely, relevant and practical advice on farm management and new developments in the world of beef and sheep farming. You can get involved in the discussion by posing your own questions to the presenters through a Q&A box on the bottom of the screen during the webinar. On Wednesday August 5 our topic will



be "How to Make a €500 Net Profit in Dairy Calf to Beef Systems" and for August 19 we will cover "Pre-mating Vaccination in Sheep". Register online at: www.teagasc.ie/letstalkcattlesheep.

Other events

Virtual **Sheep Open Week** from September 21-25 – more details to follow. Annual **Sheep Ireland EuroStar multi-breed ram sale** takes place on Saturday, August 22 in Tullamore Mart.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Moving machines bring danger

For the year to date, farm workplace deaths are above average (14 to mid July), so it is vital to give farm safety foremost attention to prevent further tragedy. August is harvest month, with a lot of machinery movement including grain trailers, bales and silage. Movement brings danger, particularly to bystanders, including children and older farmers. In August also, a lot of use is made of powered machines. Always ensure that machine moving parts are guarded, particularly machines used in a stationary position,



Harvest brings danger.

e.g., augers, or slurry vacuum tankers. Persons entangled in machine moving parts suffer horrific injuries. It is vital also to continue to implement Covid-19 prevention guidelines to eliminate this deadly virus.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Grass growth rebounds

FRANK CAMPION, of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry reports on grass growth, weaning and finishing strategies on the BETTER sheep farms.



Lowland lambs have been weaned, while weaning of hill lambs is underway.

The lowland flocks in the programme weaned in June/early July, with the performance presented in **Table 1**. Performance was mixed between the flocks, with drought conditions hampering some flocks; however, most of the farms had a draft of lambs ready for sale just before or at weaning time. A flush of grass growth after the end of the dry period of

weather has allowed the farms to start cutting silage again and winter feed supplies are on target. The farms have begun to look to next year also, with cull ewes pulled out from the flocks, thin ewes marked and rams being examined to assess what purchases might be needed as ram sales commence.

On the hill flocks, late July/August will mean weaning lambs and making a decision as to what to do with the lamb crop. This will differ between farms depending on what grass is available at weaning, what grass will be needed for the ewe flock later in the year, store lamb markets and also the breakdown of the lamb weaning weights. The breakdown of lamb weights will be crucial for farms hoping to finish lambs, as those weighing >30kg will be easier to finish, whereas lighter lambs will require a different plan depending on the facilities and grass supply on the farm.

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

| Birth type | Growth rate (g/day) | | 14-week weight (kg) | |
|------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Mean | Range | Mean | Range |
| 1 | 302 | (254-386) | 36 | (31.3-43.5) |
| 2 | 253 | (224-282) | 30 | (27.1-32.8) |
| 3+ | 250 | (229-278) | 29 | (27.0-32.2) |

RESEARCH UPDATE

Back on track



FIONA MCGOVERN, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the latest from the INZAC flock, Athenry.

Grass growing conditions have returned to optimum levels here in Athenry since my last

update. Grass growth is currently 51kg DM/ha, with a demand of 46kg DM/ha. This has allowed us to remove 25% of each farmlet for reseeding, with paddocks being sprayed off in early to mid July. All lambs in the INZAC flock were weaned on June 15, at approximately 100 days of age. To date over 100 lambs have been drafted from the experiment, with the largest proportion of these coming from both

the Elite Irish and New Zealand groups. As we go to print, lambs are currently averaging 38kg liveweight and are growing at approximately 200g/day post weaning. We are continuing to monitor the faecal egg counts (FECs) of lambs; to date, (July 15) our lambs haven't reached the threshold worm egg count for drenching, with counts less than 400epg. This is quite unusual as our lambs haven't required drenching since late April, but it conveys the importance of regular

monitoring to avoid unnecessary treatment.

All lambs receive a cobalt drench fortnightly at weighing. At this point all ewes have been thoroughly examined and cross checked against lambing records in order to make culling decisions and to avoid holding onto problem ewes within the flock. This year we are measuring the methane output of all of our ewes and female replacements. In the last six weeks, we have measured 700 animals in our portable accumulation chambers



A sheep in a portable accumulation chamber to measure methane emissions.

(PACs), which will allow us to determine the impact of genetic potential on the environmental 'hoofprint' of the animal. You will hear more about our methane measurements and latest updates from the INZAC flock during our Virtual Sheep Open Week, which is taking place from September 21-25. We look forward to welcoming you virtually to Teagasc Athenry to gain an insight into the breeding and genetics research programme.