

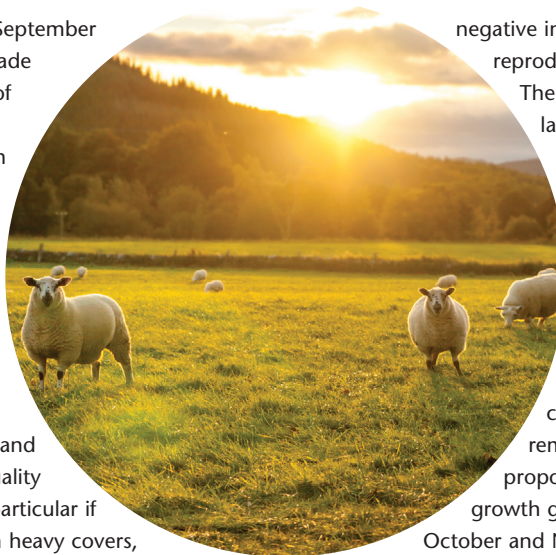
SHEEP

November 2021

Grassland management

Edited by
Damian Costello,
Sheep Specialist

The high rainfall in September and into October made proper grazing out of paddocks more challenging. The aim for November is to continue to graze out to a cover of 3.5-4.0cm, clean off pastures well and allow light to get to the base of the grass plant. This encourages tillering and also ensures high-quality spring pastures. In particular if you are dealing with heavy covers, allocating three- to four-day blocks using temporary fencing is advised. You will achieve the desired residual cover while limiting any



negative impact on ewe reproductive performance.

The aim for March-lambing flocks is to begin closing up fields from mid October, starting with the paddocks that are intended to be used for turning out the first ewes and lambs in spring. Once closed, they should remain closed as a high proportion of winter grass growth generally takes place in

October and November. Check out the closing plan for the research demonstration farm, which is outlined later in this newsletter.

Keep a close eye on mating

Monitor the progress of mating closely and see out the important task of raddling the ram to the end. It is good practice to change raddle colour weekly for the first three weeks of mating. Watch out for over marking of repeats after the first cycle to pick up any ram infertility/sub-fertility issues. There is potential to join groups of ewes up at this stage as less ram power will be required to cover any repeats. Where practical, joining a group of at least three rams will reduce the risk of infertility issues with individual rams. Creating bigger groups also helps get swards grazed out quicker and reduces the number of groups of sheep, making it easier to close up paddocks. Remove any ram where you suspect a fertility problem, as well as rams with any



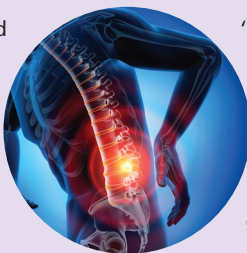
Keep raddling your rams.

physical issue. Ram lambs could also be rested after about three weeks of 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.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Prevent pain by avoiding lifting

The European Occupational Safety and Health Agency (EU-OSHA) is currently running the 'Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load 2020-22' campaign. Irish farmers have very high levels of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), with 56% affected. Furthermore, farmers over 45 years old report having 2.4 times more back pain, and 6.3 times more arthritis than younger farmers. It is clear that MSDs build up as farmers age, so the younger you start prevention activities the better. To prevent these painful and debilitating conditions



A ruptured disc is debilitating.

'lighten the load', as lifting heavy loads causes wear out of the body's joints.

Every farmer needs to have the key instinct to risk assess all loads before lifting and consider alternative ways of lifting or moving them. There is enormous potential to cut heavy lifting in farming, such as by putting wheels under gates and heavy objects, using hydraulic loaders and designing

facilities to cut heavy lifting. Also, seek training on manual handling. Further information on the EU-OSHA Lighten the Load campaign can be found at: <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/>.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Getting the most from grass

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on grass growth and utilisation on the BETTER sheep farms.

Grass growth rates and grass utilisation at the time of writing are good for most of the lowland BETTER sheep flocks, which is allowing paddocks to be grazed out properly ahead of closing for the winter. All of the farms are following an autumn closing plan and aiming to have 20% of the farm closed by the end of October. Pre-grazing grass covers were comparatively high for this time of year on some of the farms in late September and early

October, meaning paddocks had to be subdivided to allow ewes to graze out paddocks correctly without forcing the ewes to have long residency periods in the paddocks. Analysis of mating liveweights and body condition score (BCS) for the mature ewes from seven of the lowland BETTER sheep flocks is presented in **Table 1**. Mature ewe BCS is generally looking good across the flocks.

November means mating time for the hill flocks and ewes will be weighed and condition scored prior to being joined with the ram. While culls have already been identified and removed, any additional ewes that are in poor condition or have other issues will be culled before mating. Lambs are gone on nearly all the farms at this stage, with most taking advantage of the store lamb trade to sell their lambs this year.

Table 1: Initial analysis of mature ewe liveweight and BCS on seven of the lowland sheep flocks.

Flock	Boyle	Gavin	Gonley	Keane	Moore	O'Leary	Powell
County	Donegal	Carlow	Sligo	Wexford	Roscommon	Kerry	Tipperary
Mean liveweight (kg)	66.4	80.9	70.1	69.8	69.6	74.8	65.5
Mean BCS	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.2

Finishing lambs

For any remaining lambs coming close to finishing, the aim is to reach the maximum carcass weight that meat processors are paying on at the time of slaughter. On the other hand, regular drafting as lambs come fit is essential to ensure the target carcass weight is not being exceeded. This is particularly important where high levels of concentrates are being fed in the finishing period. For lighter lambs, if grass



supply is an issue these should be sold as stores. Where the system allows, some farmers are storing a group of these lighter lambs on grass and a low level of concentrate over the winter. These will be aimed for slaughter next

February/March, where in recent years a price rise was seen and this can be anticipated again in the period before spring lamb comes on the market. These lambs have potential to leave a good margin as well as to provide an injection of cash flow in the early part of the year.

RESEARCH UPDATE



Closing of paddocks commenced in mid October.

Mating, drafting and performance

PHILIP CREIGHTON, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the latest from the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

Rams were turned out to ewes on October 8. Ewe BCS going to the ram averaged 3.2. Up to mid October, approximately 60% of lambs from the grass-only treatments and 68% of lambs from the grass plus white clover treatments had been drafted. On a stocking rate basis, 72% of lambs have been drafted from the 11 ewes/ha groups but only 58% from the 13 ewes/ha groups. Lambs drafted to date have averaged 44.6kg liveweight, producing a 19.3kg carcass, with kill out averaging 43%. Average liveweight of remaining lambs ranges from 39.8kg to

41.7kg, lowest for the high stocking rate, grass-only treatment group and highest for the low stocking rate grass-clover groups. Lamb performance and drafting was particularly slow during September, which was not helped by a rapid increase in faecal egg counts (FECs) following the dry spell. Despite good covers of grass available (40 plus days ahead) we have introduced concentrate supplementation at a rate of 300g/hd/day since early October. This will be gradually increased to 500g/hd/day. This was introduced to try to counteract the very low dry matter content of the grass (as low as 10% DM) during the very wet spell in late September and early October. Closing of paddocks commenced in mid October to build grass for next spring. The plan is to have approximately 20% of each farmlet closed on average by late October, 40% by mid November, 60% by late November and 80% by mid December, with the remainder by late December/early January.