

SHEEP

October 2021

Grassland management

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Short of grass last spring? Do something about it for the coming spring and close up your paddocks earlier. Most of the grass available in the spring will grow during the October to December period, so if you want to have grass next spring you need to keep this grass over the winter. If flocks are still short of grass in the spring, despite closing early, you may need to look at their lambing date. Many flocks are lambing too early and run out of grass four to five weeks after lambing. This results in ewe



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milk yield/lamb growth being compromised and expensive concentrates having to be fed. Push back lambing date by a week to ten days if you find yourself in this position.

Analyse winter forage

Concentrate feed prices have gone up dramatically. Get your different batches of forage analysed so that you can use the best quality forage in the last six weeks of pregnancy to reduce concentrate feed requirements.

Lime

At the time of writing ground conditions are still very good, so it is an ideal time to apply lime to areas that are deficient. As fertiliser prices have increased dramatically, investing in lime to correct soil pH is more important than ever. The lime will have paid for itself several times over by this time next year.

Sheep scab

Avoid using injectable macrocyclic lactones when treating sheep for sheep scab as this also inadvertently treats stomach worms and puts extra pressure on selecting for resistant stomach worms. Plunge dipping (carried out correctly) is the best option for the control of external parasites in sheep. If you don't have a dipping tank on the farm there are a number of mobile plunge dip operators who travel from farm to farm. Key points for successful dipping are:

1. Start with a clean dipping tank and clean water.
2. Make up the initial dip solution according to the manufacturer's instructions and wear the correct PPE.
3. Sheep should be dry and fasted prior to dipping.
4. Each sheep should remain in the dipping tank for at least 60 seconds – this is the minimum time and not the target. Failure to observe this is why dips sometimes fail in terms of delivering a full kill or longer periods of protection against fly strike.
5. Ensure the head of each sheep is pushed under twice so that the solution gets in contact with any mites on the head.
6. Replenish the dip according to the manufacturer's recommendations (usually every 36 sheep).
7. The dip solution should be removed once one sheep per 2.25 litres (1/2 gallon) of the original dip solution has been dipped, e.g., a 200 gallon tank can dip 400 sheep before needing to be emptied and refilled.
8. When dipping is completed, empty the dipping tank immediately and dispose of the spent dip by diluting with slurry or water 3:1 and land spreading at no more than 1,700 gallons per acre.
9. Dipped sheep should be turned out into a field where they do not have access to watercourses.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Check lighting and electrical switches

The clocks go back on Sunday, October 31, which brings shorter daylight time. In advance of this check your farmyard lighting. Bulbs may need replacing and fluorescent covers may need cleaning to maximise light output. To prevent trips and falls, make sure that all walkways are well lit and free of trip hazards. Also, safely test your electrical residual current devices (RCDs) on switchboards. An RCD is an electrical



*Consult ESB Networks
Booklet: 'Farm Well Farm
Safely'*

safety trip switch that trips rapidly if an electrical leakage occurs. RCDs are mechanical and need to be test tripped regularly to ensure they are working. This is done by ensuring that there are no electrical devices operating and physically tripping the switch. For safety, ensure in particular that all handheld electrical devices, such as power washers and workshop electrical tools, are correctly wired and protected by a correctly operating RCD (30mA).



BETTER FARM UPDATE

A new production year

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway.

October signals the beginning of the next production year on most of the lowland BETTER sheep farms, with ewes being joined to rams and farms starting to put their autumn closing plan into action. The target will be to start closing paddocks in rotation 120 days prior to target turn-out date, with 20% of the farm closed by late October. Sheltered paddocks close to the yard will be prioritised as these are where ewes and lambs will be turned out to first, with the farms closing in rotation from there. For the new flock in Co. Carlow, where there is also an early lambing flock, this process has already begun with some paddocks being closed in early October to ensure sufficient covers for mid-January. For the mating season the plan for the lowland

flocks is to join the rams with the ewes for no more than six weeks to ensure that lambing is compact. Rams will be raddled and the colour changed frequently so as to identify rams that are not performing but also to allow later-lambing ewes and repeats to be fed separately where possible during late pregnancy. Thin ewes that were separated for preferential feeding in the build-up to mating are being assessed regularly, and any ewes that have not recovered sufficient body condition prior to mating will be culled.

For the hill flocks in the programme mating is not quite as close on the horizon but is still coming into focus. Ewe BCS has been consistently shown over the years to have a huge influence on pregnancy rates in hill ewes. While grass will be limited on some of these farms, it will be prioritised towards ewes at this time of the year and at mating as opposed to lambs, which, where grass supplies are limited, are being sold as stores.

Mating management

Use a raddle on your rams to guard against infertility. Anecdotal reports from pedigree flocks using AI suggest more issues with ram fertility this August. It is important that colours are changed at least every two weeks so that the number of repeat ewes can be identified. There are a number of options available when it comes to raddling rams:

- raddle paste (powder mixed with oil);
- raddle crayon; or,
- harness and crayon.

These are cheap and easy to apply. Start with the lighter colours first (yellow → orange → green → red → blue → black).

Liver fluke

Do you routinely treat sheep for liver fluke? It is useful to check if sheep need to be treated at all. If you are sending lambs or cull ewes for slaughter you should check to see if the livers are showing signs of liver fluke infection. For flocks that are not sending animals to slaughter, taking a faecal sample from 10-15 ewes and checking for fluke eggs is the next best option. Where liver fluke is detected then a flukicide that is effective against immature fluke should be used at this time of year. Do not use a fluke and worm combination for mature ewes as it puts extra pressure on selecting for resistant stomach worms.

RESEARCH UPDATE

INZAC flock Athenry

EDEL O'CONNOR, PhD student, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway.

Mating is underway for the 2022 season. Grass growing conditions have remained consistent since my last update: average grass growth over the past few weeks has been 77kg DM/day, with 31 days ahead. Having a surplus at this time of year is always welcome as our grazing pressure increases with multiple mating groups. As we head into the autumn and the beginning of a new production year, we are building grass supplies to carry us through to housing in December. Importantly, we will also concentrate on closing paddocks to ensure that there will be enough grass for ewes after lambing next year. Grassland will need a rest period of 120 days over the winter, which means we need to begin closing paddocks from October 15.

As we go to print, the INZAC Suffolk and Texel ewes are being sponged using Chronogest sponges, and will receive an injection of 400iu PMSG prior to artificial insemination, which is due to take place on October 6 and 13. All ewes have been weighed, body condition scored and divided into mating groups. As we use approximately 30 rams across the flock for mating, it is important that all ewes are



Prior to mating, rams need to reach a BCS of 3.5 to 4.0.

allocated correctly to their mating group. Each of our ewes is artificially inseminated using fresh semen and subsequently run with rams for up to two repeat cycles. Inbreeding analysis is carried out across all of our flock to ensure that there is no interrelationship between ewes and rams at mating. Prior to mating rams receive 500g concentrates per head per day to ensure that they reach a body condition score (BCS) target of 3.5-4.0 at mating.

The remainder of the 2021 lambs continue to graze ahead of the ewes in a leader-follower system. Since mid-September our lighter lambs have been receiving concentrate supplementation at 350g per head per day. Recently we have seen worm counts increase in our lambs so we are carrying out a drench test in order to see if there is resistance to certain anthelmintics used in our flock. The drench test will check if the drench is working and how effective it is at killing the worms in the lambs.