

SHEEP

August 2021

Grassland management

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Continue to offer the best grass available on the farm to lambs and thinner ewes where body condition score needs to be improved before breeding. Once lambs have been weaned for three to four weeks, it can be more practical to graze the group of thin ewes along with lambs. It's also important to focus on building grass reserves for the autumn/winter grazing period.

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.

Lamb performance

Keep a close eye on lamb performance – ideally lambs are being finished off high-quality grass with at least fortnightly drafting. It is important to take stock of remaining lambs on the farm and consider the market outlets. Contact your local advisor to further discuss the options – finishing, selling as stores/ewe replacements, or a combination of both. If grass supply or quality is a limiting factor, then concentrate supplementation will be required to keep lambs moving towards the desired

liveweight and fat cover for slaughter. Where meal feeding is necessary, the most economical way to supplement is to target the heavier lambs. For example, in the case of a lowland flock, all lambs over say 38kg are grouped together and fed a suitable lamb-finishing concentrate in troughs at a rate of 300-500g/head/day. Assuming grass supply is adequate, it is better to keep lighter lambs on a grass-based diet until they reach around 38kg, when they can then be joined with the finishing group.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Performance and dosing

FRANK CAMPION, of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lamb weights and FECs on the BETTER sheep farms.

As presented in **Table 1**, the lowland flocks were weaned in late June/early July and, as with any group, performance varied but was generally good across the flocks. A number of the farms had a small draft of lambs ready for sale just before or at weaning time. A key performance metric the farms are looking at apart from average performance is the proportion of lambs that are either less than 25kg, 25-30kg, 30-35kg and 35kg+. While all flocks will have lambs that are less than 25kg or 25-30kg, it's the proportion of these that's important and will influence management decisions for finishing lambs, with the higher-performing flocks having more than 50% of lambs over 30kg at weaning. All the flocks are also monitoring faecal egg counts (FECs) to assess when it is necessary to dose. Samples are being taken fortnightly and once egg counts exceed 500 eggs per gram, then lambs



Ewes need to be in good condition for mating.

are being dosed with the appropriate anthelmintic.

While most of the attention at this time of year is focused on maximising lamb performance, thought also needs to turn to next year, with cull ewes being pulled out from the flocks and thin ewes being marked and once dried off given preferential grazing. It will be important for the farms to monitor these thin ewes for the next couple of months in the lead up to mating, as ewes failing to recover condition will need to be culled, with the target to have no ewes less than body condition score 3.0 at mating time.

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

Birth type	14-week weight (kg)		Growth rate (g/day)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
1	35.9	(33.2-39.8)	304	(281-338)
2	31.6	(28.4-32.7)	268	(241-278)
3+	30.4	(28.4-32.2)	264	(247-278)

Anthelmintic product effectiveness

As highlighted in the BETTER Farm update, participant farmers are collecting faecal samples from lambs every two weeks to carry out FECs in order to determine the need to dose for stomach worms. A group faecal sample is a good indicator of when FECs are likely to impact on lamb performance and can eliminate unnecessary treatments when FECs remain below 500 eggs per gram. FECs taken pre and post dosing form a valuable piece of information to check if the three main anthelmintic classes used in Ireland are working on your farm. Details of how to complete this drench test are available on this video



(<https://youtu.be/1TXV1kpMhs8>), which can be accessed by scanning the QR code here with your smartphone.

UPCOMING EVENT

**Annual Sheep Ireland LambPlus Elite
EuroStar Multi-Breed Ram Sale 2021**

Saturday, August 28 in Kilkenny Mart
Sale starts at 11.30am with online bidding available. All 300+ rams for sale will be five-star on Replacement and/or Terminal Index

HEALTH & SAFETY

Beware of moving machinery

August is harvest month and a lot of machinery is moving on farms and public roads, including trailers, balers and silage gear. Movement brings danger, particularly to bystanders, including children and older farmers. A vehicle travelling at walking speed (5km/hour) travels 1.4 metres per second. Being struck gives a bystander little chance due to the impact force.

In August, a lot of powered



Stay out of crush zones.

machines are used so make sure moving parts are guarded. This applies particularly to machines used in a stationary position, like augers and slurry vacuum tanker drive shafts. Entanglement in a moving machine part leads to horrific injuries. Also be aware of the dangers of livestock, particularly bulls at the end of the breeding season and autumn-calving cows with calves at foot.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Increasing grass growth after a slow start

EDEL O'CONNOR, PhD student, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the INZAC Flock at Athenry.

Grass growing conditions have returned to optimum levels here in Athenry since my last update. Grass growth is currently 66kg DM/ha, with a demand of 35kg DM/ha. All lambs in the INZAC flock were weaned on June 8, at approximately 93 days of age. Average weaning weights for the three groups were: 31.7kg (New Zealand); 30.2kg (High Irish); and, 29.3kg (Low Irish). As we go to print, lambs are currently averaging 35kg liveweight. We are continuing to monitor the FECs of lambs. It is important to regularly monitor this 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 summer we are measuring methane output from 60 of our two-year-old ewes from the INZAC flock in Teagasc Moorepark using the SF₆ tracer technique. This method is commonly used to measure methane production from grazing animals and takes samples of methane from around the animal's



Methane measurement devices on ewes at Athenry.

nose. We are going to compare this method to our portable accumulation chambers in Athenry to determine the best method of measuring methane from grazing sheep. During this experiment, we will also be measuring the dry matter intake of the ewes at grass to determine the link between methane output and ewe intake.

