

# SHEEP

November 2022

## Grassland management

Edited by  
**Damian Costello,**  
Sheep Specialist

As closing date is the main factor influencing the amount of grass available next spring, the aim for March-lambing flocks is to begin closing paddocks from mid October starting with paddocks that will be grazed first in spring. In order to avoid any negative impact on ewe reproductive performance, it is important that paddocks are grazed out quickly to 3.5-4.0cm, thus not forcing ewes to graze low covers for a prolonged period. The use of temporary electric fencing to allocate three to four days of grass at a time works well here. A further aid to

achieving good clean-out of swards is grouping up ewes into larger groups after the first cycle.



*Group up ewes to achieve good clean-out of swards.*

## Monitor progress of mating

Where ewe mating groups are merged three weeks after ram turnout, less ram power will then be required, as it will be mainly repeats being covered.

Remove any ram where you suspect a fertility problem, as well as rams with any physical issue. Ram lambs could also be

rested, if possible, at this stage 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.

## Thin ewe survey

Do you have a number of ewes that have failed to regain body condition score (BCS) since weaning despite having access to the best of grazing? In some cases this can be explained by issues such as chronic lameness, broken mouth, etc., but where there is no obvious reason why ewes have remained very thin it merits investigation.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) regional veterinary laboratories, in association with Teagasc, are carrying out a study focusing on identifying the causes of poor BCS in Irish sheep flocks. The survey involves booking in and submitting three thin ewes per flock to a regional veterinary laboratory for euthanasia and post mortem, along with providing some basic flock information. It



*A study aims to discover why some ewes fail to regain BCS.*

provides a cost-effective method of screening your flock for the presence of the so-called iceberg diseases. For further information contact your local Teagasc advisor, veterinary surgeon or your nearest DAFM regional veterinary laboratory.

On low K index soils, apply 50% Muriate of Potash when closing up paddocks



Review your parasite control plan for liver fluke going into the housing period



Order your protected urea for 2023



Continue to spread lime where conditions allow



Soil sample your farm



Test your silage



# Slurry and manure study

Farmers know the value of manure and slurry as organic fertilisers; however, there are numerous other commercially valuable uses for these materials, including: composting; conversion into biogas using anaerobic digestion; as a fuel for combustion; filler for cement mortars; and, processing for feed, etc. Teagasc is seeking 30 beef, dairy, pig, sheep and broiler farmers to participate

in a study that will analyse the composition of animal slurry and manure, and assess their suitability for a range of uses with and without pre treatment. All results will be anonymised and each farmer will receive his/her results free. To express an interest, please fill in the online form (name, farm type and email) using the following link: [www.teagasc.ie/animalwastes](http://www.teagasc.ie/animalwastes).

## BETTER FARM UPDATE

### Weight and body condition score

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the condition of the BETTER sheep flocks heading into the winter.

Analysis of mating liveweights and body condition score (BCS) for the mature ewes from five of the lowland BETTER sheep flocks is presented in **Table 1**. Mature ewe BCS generally looks good across the farms but there is a large degree of variation in scores within some of these flocks. All the lowland flocks are now well and truly into the mating season and reports are things have gone well. Farms breeding ewe lambs joined them near the end of October, a couple of weeks after introducing rams to the main flock. Most of the farms are reporting that grass supplies for ewes are good, but there is some variation within this, with flocks affected by

low rainfall levels in July and August having lower than desired pre-grazing covers for this time of year. All of the farms are following an autumn closing plan and will aim to have 20% of their farms closed by the end of October, with a further 20% (40% in total) closed by mid November. The hill flocks are starting to gather ewes for mating and will be introducing rams from November 4 up to around November 20. As with the lowland flocks, ewes will be weighed and condition scored prior to mating, with any additional ewes that are in poor condition or have other issues being culled before mating.

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

Flock	Gavin	Keane	Moore	O'Leary	O'Toole
County	Carlow	Wexford	Roscommon	Kerry	Galway
Mean liveweight (kg)	77.6	71.8	72.6	73.8	58.4
Mean BCS	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.1

## RESEARCH UPDATE



### Preparing to close up

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

Rams were turned out to ewes on October 7. Ewe BCS going to the ram averaged 3.3. Up to mid October approximately 65% of lambs from the grass-only treatments and 78% of lambs from the grass plus white clover treatments had been drafted. Lambs drafted to date have averaged 45.6kg liveweight and produced a 20.1kg carcass, with kill-out averaging 44%. Kill-out on the last batch of lambs killed was 43% (mid October). Average liveweight of the remaining lambs is 39.1kg, with an average daily gain (ADG) of 130g/head/day for the lambs on the grass swards, and 164g/head/day for the lambs on the grass-clover swards recorded for the period from mid September to mid October. We had a spike in faecal egg counts in the lambs in mid September.

They were treated and levels have remained low since. Despite good covers of grass available (40 plus days ahead) we have introduced concentrate supplementation at a rate of 300g/head/day since mid October.

This will be gradually increased to 500g/head/day. This was introduced to get remaining lambs accustomed to ration prior to housing for finishing. This will save remaining grass for ewes. 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, 80% by mid December, with the remainder by late December/early January.

## HEALTH & SAFETY



### Over 4,500 farm accidents occur annually

Research from the Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS) has revealed that there were 4,523 accidents on Irish farms during 2020. The data shows over 88% of these accidents involved the farm operator, with a further 11% relating to family members. Farm workers accounted for the remaining 1%. In almost half of cases (47%) the injured persons required more than a three-day absence from farm work, the threshold for legal accident reporting. Over 20% were out of work for between four and 10 days, with 6% unable to work for 11 to 60 days. Close to one-fifth (19%)

of those involved in farm accidents lost 61 or more days of work. Correspondingly, 19% did not lose work time. This data illustrates clearly the impact a farm accident has on the farmer, the farm family, and the farm business. It is important to take action on your farm to prevent these accidents. Reduced daylight hours over the coming weeks will make it vitally important to plan tasks properly and make allowances for colder weather. Pay particular attention to lighting around the farmyard and on tractors and farm vehicles. Good preparation is essential to cut risks.