

## sheep

# Good handling units cut the workload and enhance safety

The TAMS 3 grants available for sheep handling facilities can help farmers cut their workload by 24 days per annum and reduce the risk of injuries.

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A Teagasc study has found that good handling facilities can save farmers 75 minutes working time per ewe. For a 150-ewe flock, this amounts to 192 hours or 24 working days per year. Routine tasks such as checking body condition scoring, drenching, vaccinating, and footbathing are more likely to be completed safely and in a timely manner when good handling facilities are in place.

Sheep handling units, both fixed and mobile, are now eligible for 60% grant aid under the Farm Safety Capital Investment Scheme (FSCIS) entry route of TAMS 3.

There is an investment ceiling of €90,000 and a minimum spend of €2,000 per application.

For fixed handling units, VAT can be reclaimed with the net investment in all cases being treated as a capital investment for income tax purposes.

## Choosing a sheep handling system

There is a wide range of mobile units on the market, ideal for fragmented farms. When deciding on a system ask yourself:

- How many sheep do I have; and how many do I intend to have?
- How many land blocks are my sheep grazed on?
- Where would I site a fixed unit (main block used for sheep)?
- If sheep are carried on out-farms,

could they be transported to the main handling unit?

- Would a mobile unit be more suitable?

## Mobile sheep handling equipment

A TAMS 3 application for mobile equipment does not require sketches or planning permission. Compare systems, not just on price, but also on functionality. Speak with farmers using the equipment you are interested in.

Standard costings are summarised in Table 1. One, often-mentioned, point, is that the standard costings do not cater for higher end equipment – they are eligible for TAMS, but the cost far exceeds the standard costings that the 60% will be paid on.

## Fixed sheep handling unit

A good starting point is to visit a number of farms with efficient handling facilities. Also, consult the



comprehensive Teagasc publication, *A Guide to Designing a Sheep Handling Unit*, which is available on the Teagasc website.

This document provides extensive design advice along with images and sample layouts of handling systems for all flock sizes.

And remember that it is critical that your design is in compliance with



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**Table 1: Standard costings on mobile sheep handling equipment (Dept. of Agriculture, Food and the Marine DAFM)**

Sheep weighing scales	Item	€826.89
Sheep rollover crate	Item	€1,023.86
Mobile sheep batch footbath	Item	€842.38
Portable basic sheep handling race	Item	€1,064.97
Portable basic sheep handling race with wheels	Item	€3,847.75
Mobile sheep penning	Linear metre	€33.73
PDA EID tag reader and management software package	Item	€1,820
EID tag reader and software	Item	€710



Gurteen College sheep manager Ger Carey with Damian Costello viewing the main sheep handling facilities at Gurteen College in Tipperary. Using the race and two-way dividing gate for tasks such as weaning or drafting lambs takes a lot of pulling and dragging out of the tasks.

DAFM specification S.136.

A fixed sheep handling unit will require planning permission or, at minimum, a letter of exemption.

As can be seen from Table 2, the overall area of the unit is used to calculate DAFM costings with the higher rate applying if including a dip tank. This includes all concrete, penning, gates etc with weighing scales and rollover crate, if applicable, costed separately.

### Gurteen College sheep handling unit

Many attendees at Sheep 2023 at Gurteen College will recognise the photos of the impressive sheep unit they viewed on the day. Ger Carey, manager of the sheep flock on the farm, is quick to point out the value

of good handling facilities.

"Using the race and two-way dividing gate for tasks such as weaning or drafting lambs takes a lot of pulling and dragging out of the job," says Ger. The circular forcing pen is another feature he likes as it delivers an even flow of sheep into the race with minimum stress on man and beast.

"I generally use the batch footbath in tandem with other routine tasks and find it is central to lameness control in the flock," adds Ger.

An estimate of the DAFM costing for a unit similar to Gurteen College is as follows:

- Overall internal dimensions  
22.8m x 7.2m = 164.2 m<sup>2</sup>
- Costing of unit (no dip tank)  
= €103.71/ m<sup>2</sup>
- Total DAFM costing 164.2m<sup>2</sup> x  
€103.71 = €17,029.18
- TAMS 3 funding 60% x €17,029.18  
= €10,217.51  
(assuming DAFM costing is less than  
actual cost)

Other items such as sheep weighing scales and rollover crate may be included and costed separately to the main unit.

When the final layout is decided, it is important to do an estimate of the actual cost of the project.

This can be then compared to the DAFM costings (Table 2) as it is the lesser figure that the 60% grant will be paid on.

## How to mind your back when handling sheep

A farm safety report [check: published by the DAFM in 2019] found half of farmers across all enterprises reported suffering from back problems at some time in their life.

Teagasc National farm Survey data shows accidents occurred on 11% of sheep farms in 2012-2017.

Trips and falls (27%), livestock (20%) and farm vehicle/machinery (33%) were the main factors.

The HSA identifies the main risk factors associated with back pain and musculo-skeletal disorders for farmers as: lifting heavy loads, awkward postures, lifting loads to a height or to ground level, repetitive movements and poor workplace set up.

Many of these risk factors can be present on sheep farms. Sheep handlers should avoid repetitive tasks and straining muscles:

- If possible, avoid lifting/turning over sheep.
- If you have to lift a lamb, use your legs not your back.
- Minimise straining the same muscles repeatedly.
- Ensure the level of work is below the level of your heart.
- Take regular breaks when shearing or other repetitive tasks.

**Table 2:** Standard costings on fixed sheep handling equipment (Source: DAFM)

Sheep weighing scales	Item	€826.89
Sheep rollover crate	Item	€1,023.86
Fixed sheep handling unit	m <sup>2</sup>	€103.71
Fixed sheep handling unit with dip tank	m <sup>2</sup>	€140.97