

SHEEP

July 2023

Grassland management

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A dry May and first half of June has resulted in lower silage yields and covers on drier farms. July is a good time to take stock of winter forage saved. Chemical fertiliser prices have come back

significantly from last year. Consider spreading additional fertiliser if you are short of winter fodder or are tight for grass. Prioritise lambs and give them access to the best grass on the farm.

Weaning

The optimum time to wean lambs is at 14 weeks or 100 days of age. Leaving lambs on the ewes longer than this is counterproductive as the ewes compete with the lambs for the best quality grass.

Once weaned, lambs should be divided into groups based on their liveweight. The heaviest

group will be the finishing group and these should have access to the best grass and possibly receive supplementary feeding if necessary. Avoid feeding large quantities of concentrates to light lambs, as this means that lambs are consuming lots of meal, which results in high costs.

Finishing lambs vs selling as stores

If you are weighing up your options regarding finishing lambs or selling them as stores then consider using the Teagasc Store Lamb Calculator, which is an interactive tool that will

enable you to work out the economics of both options. The calculator can be accessed online at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/sheep/financial-management/>.

Ewe management after weaning

Ewes need time to recuperate after weaning. Forcing ewes to lose weight after weaning is not a good idea. Restricting ewes for a week after weaning to help to dry them up is a good

idea. After that ewes should be divided based on body condition, with thin ewes getting priority access to grass and heavier ewes being used to graze out paddocks.

Thin ewe survey

Do you have ewes that are thin, pinning and losing weight? If yes, then consider sending two or three of them to your nearest regional veterinary laboratory to see what is going on. Often, these ewes are suffering from underlying

health conditions, which need to be identified so that the appropriate safeguards can be put in place to prevent/reduce spread throughout the rest of the flock.

Wormer resistance

Treating lambs for stomach worms? Check to make sure the treatment has worked. If you are treating lambs with a white (BZ) or clear (ML) wormer then you need to take a faecal sample for analysis two weeks after treatment. If you have used a yellow wormer (LV) then you need

to take a faecal sample for analysis seven days post treatment. If after treating lambs you receive a positive result for worms, then you need to talk to your vet or advisor about potential anthelmintic resistance to that product.

Sheep Improvement Scheme ram task



Many sheep farmers have selected year one as the year in which they have to purchase and use the genotyped/star-rated ram. If you have picked year one, then select your ram early and avoid having to purchase one that you are not happy with simply to tick the box for the Sheep Improvement Scheme. The Sheep Ireland website (www.sheep.ie or through the

QR code) has a ram search function that will help you to identify rams that meet the Scheme's criteria. These rams will have a green SIS tick box.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Some choose to wean early

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on weaning, grass growth and lamb performance.

The break in weather in the middle of June was a welcome relief to some of the BETTER sheep farmers who were starting to see soil moisture deficits cause a reduction in grass growth rates. Some of the flocks took the decision to wean the lambs a couple of weeks earlier than planned in order to reduce overall grass demand on the farm to ensure the best grass was kept for the lambs. This meant flocks were weaning at ~12 weeks as opposed to ~14 weeks.

Grass growth rates and demand are being monitored carefully. The plan after weaning is for the lambs to graze swards to 5.5-6cm with ewes

following behind to clean out paddocks to 3.5-4cm. Lamb performance to seven weeks was behind for some of the flocks, which will mean weaning weights will also be behind target. These flocks are each setting up a 'finishing group' at weaning. This group will be made up of lambs >38kg that are going for sale and these will be offered ~500g/day of concentrates until finished. The lighter lambs will remain on grass only, and as lambs hit 38-40kg, they will be drafted into the finishing group. For the flocks where performance earlier in the spring suffered, this will help increase drafting rates to ensure that there are not too many lambs still on the farm later in the year. Lambs will be offered feed in troughs, and by keeping the level to 500g/day will only require feeding once daily.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Farm Safety Week 2023

July is the most dangerous month of the year on farms so extra vigilance is needed. A lot of hazardous work takes place, particularly with machinery, while safety for children needs special attention.

Farm Safety Week takes place commencing Monday July 17 with the following programme:

- Monday July 17 – launch of Farm Safety Week by a famous person;
- Tuesday July 18 – quad safety – new quad safety regulations;
- Wednesday July 19 – livestock handling –

talks at marts and social media video on livestock safety;

- Thursday July 20 – long-term health – collaboration with the Irish Heart Foundation; and,
- Friday July 21 – farm safety heroes – nominate a farm safety hero to the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA).

Farm Safety Week is a collaborative campaign, initiated by the Farm Safety Partnership in the UK and led in Ireland by the IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Committee. Make farm safety your priority during Farm Safety Week and every week.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Weaning lamb performance



FIONA MCGOVERN, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on the latest from the INZAC and breeding flocks at Athenry.

Thankfully over the past week (mid June) we have seen some thundery rain showers in Athenry, which were definitely needed to get grass growth back on track. Growth is currently 45kg DM/ha, but we are expecting this to pick up now that the rain has returned. All lambs in the INZAC flock were weaned on June 15, at approximately 98 days of age. As part of INZAC phase II, we have a fourth treatment group of New Zealand (NZ) x high Irish (HI) animals. Average weaning weights for the four groups were 38.6kg NZ, 36.2kg HI, 31.6kg low Irish and 35.5kg (NZ x HI). Despite the harsh start in spring, the good weather in May really boosted lamb thrive, with growth rates averaging 260-310g/day pre weaning across the treatment groups.

All lambs in our flock are ultrasound scanned for back fat and muscle depth as part of the Sheep Ireland Programme. The first group of lambs are scanned in early July, after which we can select our replacement ewe and ram lambs and begin drafting lambs for slaughter. We are continuing to monitor the faecal egg counts (FECs) of lambs. It is important to regularly monitor this to avoid unnecessary treatment. Group samples are collected via FECPAK once every fortnight



Ewes have been thoroughly examined and cross-checked against lambing records for culling decisions.

and once counts are over 600 eggs per gram (EPG) all lambs are dosed. To date, our lambs have received one drench for nematodirus and one drench post weaning. 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. At weaning ewe body condition score (BCS) was higher than we've seen in previous years, with ewes averaging 3.4 BCS. Ewes have been restricted post weaning but will be given access to good quality grass from now until mating with any thin ewes (BCS <3.0) getting preference. Ideally, we would like our ewe BCS to be 3.5 on average at mating, which for us is the beginning of October.