

SHEEP

June 2023

SHEEP 2023



SHEEP 2023 will be the largest dedicated sheep industry event of 2023. Following on from very successful past events held on the Teagasc Athenry Campus, this year's event will take place in a new venue, Gurteen Agricultural College, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, E53 TP93 on Saturday June 17. This is a free event with gates opening from 10:00am, with the event running until 4:00pm.

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Sheep Specialist

Lots to see and do, including:

- sheep shows;
- trade exhibits;
- technical villages;
- cookery demonstration;
- butchery demonstration;
- children's entertainment; and,
- much much more!

For more information scan the QR code with your phone.



Grassland

Getting the balance between supply and demand while trying to maintain quality and not over tighten lambs as they approach weaning can be tricky at this point in the season, with grass growth rates taking off. For June, the target is to have 10 days of grazing

ahead of the flock to keep overall supply in check. Where this is significantly exceeded, drop out heavier covers for silage. Depending on the farm's fodder situation, ideally cut without delay to get these paddocks back into the grazing rotation for the post-

weaning period. Pre weaning, aim for pre-grazing covers of 1,200kg DM/ha or 8cm, grazing to a residual of 4.5cm. Reducing the size of larger grazing areas through the use of temporary fencing will reduce residency time, aid better clean outs, and reduce the time spent grazing low covers. With weaning approaching, have a plan for

where lambs will graze post weaning, targeting fertiliser where needed. Post weaning, give lambs access to the best available pasture. Aftergrass or reseeds are preferable. Where grazing on existing pasture, increase the grazing residual for lambs post weaning to 5.5-6cm using the dry ewes or other classes of stock to achieve graze outs.

Silage

Depleted silage stocks on many farms combined with delayed closing/fertiliser applications this year may put farms under pressure to meet their winter feed requirements. It's a good idea to take stock of

the current fodder supply on your farm and complete a fodder budget. Put plans in place early to make up any short falls that may exist. For more advice contact your local Teagasc advisor for assistance.

Weaning

Time to start planning the weaning of March-born lambs. The standard recommendation is to wean lambs by 14 weeks of age. In certain cases, weaning lambs earlier from 10 to 12 weeks of age is a useful management tool, such as with yearling or thin ewes to allow them extra time to recover condition. It also has potential to benefit farms in areas prone to

drought, by reducing overall feed demand on the farm earlier and allowing the prioritisation of grazing for weaned lambs. Having necessary health treatments for internal/external parasites, lameness, vaccinations and mineral supplementation (where needed) up to date prior to weaning is advisable to reduce any setbacks.

OviCast



The Teagasc Sheep podcast, *OviCast*, has regular updates covering technical aspects on grassland, breeding, nutrition and health, as well as industry-focused episodes. Scan the QR code and start listening.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Make silage while the sun shines

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

During May, most of the farms took the opportunity when the weather allowed to make a proportion of their silage. This was important for the flocks, as most was high quality silage that will be marked for ewes pre lambing next winter but also because grass supplies were getting ahead of flocks. The flocks will be targeting 10 grazing days ahead from early June and grass supply had been climbing rapidly for a time in May. For the most part, this has been brought back under control by dropping out paddocks and subdividing them as necessary. This is vital as if grass quality is allowed to decline between now and weaning, lamb performance will be reduced. Second rounds of fertiliser have been applied across the farms with rates varying depending on stocking rate and grass supply. However, even where grass supplies were good, at least 25 units/ha were applied (10 units/ac) to help maintain grass quality.



High quality silage will be marked for ewes pre lambing next winter.

All of the lowland farms weighed their lambs in May when they were at approximately seven weeks of age. Lamb growth rates for five of the lowland flocks from birth to seven weeks post lambing are presented in **Table 1**. Growth rates are back on previous years. The weather in March (particularly for the early March-lambing flocks) is one reason being cited by the farmers for this.

The hill flocks have begun letting their single-rearing ewes and lambs back to the hill during May. These lambs will be weighed at seven weeks of age to assess performance to date. Twin-rearing ewes and their lambs are being held on the green ground or improved areas of the hill.

Table 1: Mean lamb performance from the lowland flocks from birth to seven weeks of age with range in brackets for five of the lowland flocks.

| Birth type | Birth weight (kg) | Growth rate (g/day) | Seven-week weight (kg) |
|------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | 6.0 (5.2-6.7) | 309 (265-353) | 21.5 (19.7-23.3) |
| 2 | 5.2 (4.6-5.5) | 270 (240-286) | 18.2 (15.5-19.0) |
| 3+* | 4.4 (3.7-4.8) | 272 (249-288) | 17.5 (15.0-18.4) |

*Born as triplets and reared as twins.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Organise to stay safe



Safety at silage making.

So far in 2023, three farm workplace fatalities have been reported to the Health and Safety Authority (provisional data at May 15). A Teagasc National Farm Survey study has shown that over 4,500 farm workplace injuries occur annually, with 80% requiring medical treatment. During June, farm work gets busy, especially with tractor and machinery and livestock-related work. Organising work is crucial to prevent injuries. This involves keeping safety to the fore by having all guards in place and using safe work practices. Contractors play

a huge role in farm work, and it is vital that farmers and contractors communicate closely about schedules and safety, especially when there is a backlog of work due to adverse weather. In this newsletter pack we include a health and safety newsletter on safety with bulls. These animals present a constant hazard on farms and vigilance is necessary, especially as the breeding season progresses. As June progresses, school holidays arrive, so make preparations for childhood safety over the summer months.