

Key tasks in a tricky season

It's been a challenging spring for sheep farmers, but there's still time to get back on track prior to weaning

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GRASSLAND

- Getting grazing group(s) set up and establishing a grazing rotation early in the season will help boost lamb performance and can aid grass growth. Aim to have five grazing divisions per group. Batching up ewes and lambs into larger groups will streamline this.
- Target pre-grazing covers of 1,100 – 1,300 kg DM/ha (7 to 8 cm) grazing down to a residual of 4.5 cm for optimum performance. Monitor paddocks. Higher covers are not ideal for sheep grazing and may suit other classes of stock (cattle) or can be dropped out and cut for silage.
- Reduce residency period i.e. the time sheep are spending grazing out fields. To get the balancing act right between keeping fresh leafy grass in front of the flocks while maintaining sward quality by achieving good graze outs can be tricky in May and June.

There are two approaches you can take:

- Increase grazing group size: batching up groups further, or where available, by adding cattle to the group
- Reducing grazing area though the use of temporary fencing.

Get these set up early in the season and focus on the larger grazing areas first.

TEMPORARY FENCING: KEY TIPS

- Ensure the fencer is suitable to cover the area required
- Connect power to the open end of reel
- Ensure good connection between strands
- Ensure fencer is well earthed
- Check for breaks in wire
- Recommended heights for early and mid-season can be seen in Figure 1 (opposite).

Lastly aim to produce a portion of high quality silage for the coming winter either through surplus or dedicated cuts – this will have a major impact

on ewe performance and concentrate requirement next spring. Ewes will require approximately 20 bales per 100 ewes per month during the housed period.

HEALTH

- The first two parasite challenges young lambs will face are *Nematodirus* and *Coccidia*. On occasion lambs can be infected with both parasites at the same time.
- *Coccidia* primarily affects lambs from two weeks up to 8 – 9 weeks of age. *Nematodirus* (*battus*) is the other main early season parasite. In general it affects lambs aged from 6 to 12 weeks but may occur in younger lambs.
- While the high risk period has passed parasites will still pose an issue for flocks lambing in late March/early April. Earlier lambing flocks should also be mindful of late lambs as these often don't fall into the main dosing schedule.
- Strongyles are the main stomach worms that impact lambs during the grazing season and can pose a significant challenge particularly with wide spread anthelmintic resistance. This will begin to pose an issue from May onward as lambs consume increasing amounts of grass.
- Monitor groups for signs of scour/ill thrift, consider collecting faecal samples fortnightly to monitor worm burden and inform dosing decisions.
- Post-weaning, conduct a drench test on the product(s) being relied on when dosing. Talk to your vet/advisor in advance of this to find out what steps are



necessary and have this lined up as an essential task to complete this summer.

Blowfly control

The typical risk period for blowfly strike starts each season as temperatures increase from late April and continues right through to October. It's important to have preventative measures in place early.

There is no benefit to waiting until the first strike occurs. Aside from the damage to the individual affected it also results in an increased challenge on the farm. These common products used can be split into two categories based on their active ingredient and mode of action:

Insecticidal pour-ons

- There are a number of pyrethroid based pour-ons (e.g. cypermethrin) which offer short term cover (6-8 weeks) from flystrike on the areas where they are applied. These products will also kill maggots if they are applied directly to the larvae.

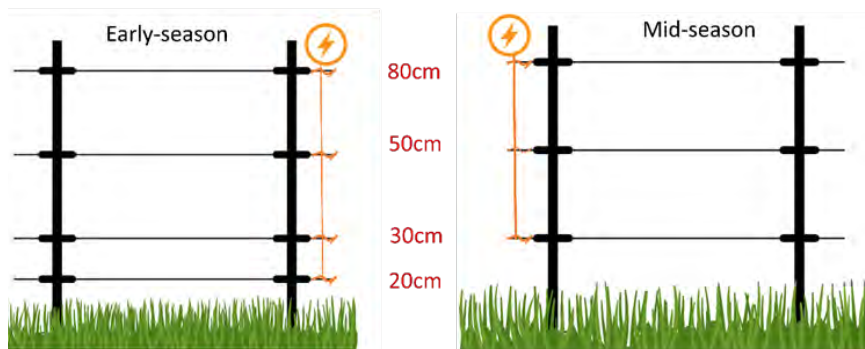


Figure 1: Recommended heights for early and mid-season fencing



Insect Growth Regulators (IGR's)

These products work by interrupting the life cycle of the larvae and need to be applied before the blowfly lays eggs. There are a number of different products within this category on the market with varying lengths of cover.

Be aware of the periods of cover for the chosen product and re-apply once this is up where required. Check withdrawal dates as these vary between products

Lameness

The main causes of lameness are scald, footrot and increasingly CODD. Scald and Footrot can be controlled with regular foot bathing, however more severe cases of footrot and CODD will require antibiotic treatment and farmers should consult their vets.

When foot bathing using the correct procedure is going to have a major impact on success.

- Use products appropriately: correct dilution and mixing procedure is vital
- Formalin – 3% dilution
- Zinc sulphate – 10% solution
- Copper sulphate – 10% solution
- Others according to manufacturers' instructions.

- The solution should be 5cm deep – this may need to be topped up in walk-through footbaths.

- Contact time is important for products like Zinc and Copper sulphate.

- After foot bathing animals should be allowed to stand on a clean hard surface ideally for up to one hour before going back to pasture.

Correct procedure is essential to foot-bathing success.

Monitoring ewe performance

A difficult season will always highlight the poorer performing ewes. One of the most effective ways of boosting flock performance is to remove the poorest performers or put in place the necessary interventions to address the underlying issues.

Some of these will be obvious culling reasons but on occasion you will find ewes in good condition that simply display either poor mothering ability or milk yield. Is it worth carrying these into the next season?

It has been challenging to keep ewes on target body condition this past season which will have an impact on this year's lamb performance. Assessing body condition on ewes and managing accordingly is a useful management tool. Here are a couple of things to consider for thinner ewes:

- Is there an underlying health issue that needs to be addressed e.g. lameness, fluke, poor mouths. Can these be addressed?
- Can they be grouped separately and their lambs receive concentrate supplementation?
- Is early weaning an option for this cohort to allow them longer to recover - may be a worthwhile consideration for younger ewes.

Looking forward, have you plans in place for weaning and subsequent management? Look back at last year's performance and drafting. Are there potentially issues that can be addressed such as conducting a drench test? Do you need to establish finishing groups earlier in the season?

These are areas that are worth reviewing and will require some advanced planning to improve performance this season. Keep the focus on getting the basics right and what you can control inside the farm gate. Where issues occur, take action and don't hesitate to seek advice.

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