

SHEEP

April 2024

Grassland management

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Turnout has been delayed across the country by wet weather.

Soil moisture

Lots of rain in late February and March means that not a lot of sheep farmers managed to get fertiliser out prior to lambing. Having fertiliser in the yard to spread when ground conditions allow is essential. It takes about four to six weeks for the grass to grow from a fertiliser application, so fertiliser spread today will result in grass for grazing/silage four to six weeks later.

Nitrogen applications

Urea is much cheaper than CAN per kg of nitrogen (N). If spreading straight N then there are huge benefits in terms of cost



LACTATING
EWES SHOULD
RECEIVE

3-5_g

of magnesium per
head per day.

savings and environmental savings from using protected urea. If you are spreading compound fertilisers, especially if there is a significant phosphorous (P) requirement, then opt for a product like 18:6:12 or 10:10:20. Again, these are better from a cost and environmental emission point of view than some of the other NPK options.

Grouping up lambs

Fewer grazing groups means more paddocks/fields are being rested and regrowth is protected. The aim should be to have five permanent divisions per grazing group. On sheep farms, the way to reduce the number of grazing groups is to group up ewes and lambs into bigger grazing groups. This is also advantageous in terms of simplifying flock health treatments such as nematodirus control, etc.

Silage ground

Making high-quality silage starts with having high-quality grass. Remove any old grasses from the field by fully grazing out silage ground before closing up. While we generally try to avoid compacting ground, it is important to roll silage ground once weather conditions allow to reduce the risk of contamination with soil during harvesting.

Liming subsidy

The closing date for spreading lime that was purchased last year under the liming subsidy scheme has been extended. Lime purchased under the scheme must be spread by Friday June 28, 2024. If you intend to spread lime on ground from which silage is being harvested then it would be best to delay the application until after silage has been harvested.

Drafting early lambs

High sheep and lamb prices have been seen in recent months. It makes no sense to keep

lambs to above pay weight. Monitor kill-out rates and draft lambs as they come fit.

Flock health

Tetany control

Grass tetany is caused by a deficiency of magnesium (Mg). As Mg is not stored in the body to any great extent, lactating ewes need to be supplemented with it daily. The recommended daily supplementation rates are 3-5g Mg per head per day. Using high Mg mineral buckets is probably the most cost-effective way to supplement Mg to ewes at a



Ewes need magnesium to prevent grass tetany.

rate that will deliver close to the daily recommended levels. Other options include

meal feeding, pasture dusting and Mg boluses. Supplementation of Mg in water is not effective as ewes will drink very little water during wet weather.

Nematodirus control

Nematodirus battus is the first worm that lambs will encounter (usually at five to six weeks of age) in the spring. These worms overwinter on pasture and hatch in huge

numbers once weather conditions allow (a period of warmer weather). Sheep farmers should use a white drench (benzimidazole) for the control of this parasite as there is little resistance to that category of wormer with this particular parasite.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) also publishes a nematodirus forecast, so keep an eye out for this in the farming press.



Weather delays turnout

FRANK CAMPION of Teagasc AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway reports from the BETTER sheep farms around the country.

Weather conditions are having an impact on the Teagasc BETTER sheep farms, delaying field fertiliser spreading and also delaying turning ewes and lambs out to grass after lambing. To date (mid March) only a couple of the BETTER sheep farmers have managed to spread a small area of the farm with protected urea. Opening grass covers across the farms are good because of the autumn closing plans. Opening covers are averaging 750kg DM/ha and ranging from 600kg DM/ha to 1,000kg DM/ha.

Lambing is progressing well, and weather-related delayed turnout has been the only significant issue so far. Once ewes and lambs are out, the plan is to get them into their grazing groups within two to three



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weeks. This will reduce the amount of grazing groups and help to protect regrowth. Things can change quickly at this time of year, so it is important that close attention is paid to the average farm cover and the grazing days ahead. This is to monitor if grass supplies remain on track or if remedial action (supplementation) is needed to slow down the rotation while grass growth rates catch up to demand.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Lambing 2024

RESEARCH UPDATE

EDEL O'CONNOR and ANNE BIGGINS report on the INZAC and Belclare breeding flocks.

Lambing commenced in the INZAC flock on February 26. Ewes were synchronised and artificially inseminated in early October, resulting in a compact birthing pattern, with 67% of the ewes lambing at the time of writing (March 13). Lamb mortality is running at approximately 6% on average. Lamb birth weights are ranging from 6.29kg for singles, to 5.43kg for twins, and 4.24kg for triplets. Body condition score (BCS) of our ewes dropped from scanning to lambing. However, colostrum supplies were good. We strived to ensure all lambs received ewe colostrum through suckling or via hand milking and stomach tubing within the first two hours of birth.

Average farm cover

Current average farm cover is 491kg DM/ha. Grass covers on the first paddocks being grazed are between 6 and 8cm (800-1,200kg DM/ha). Covers on later-closed paddocks are lower than we



Between the INZAC and Belclare flocks, over 300 ewes have lambed.

would like. Grass growth is below target, currently 12kg DM/ha/day. We have seen a couple of incidences of joint-ill in lambs that were kept indoors for five to six days after birth. Lambs were spotted early and treated accordingly with antibiotics according to veterinary advice. As you are reading this we will have over 300 ewes lambed between the INZAC and Belclare flocks and we will be preparing for the 40-day weights, which are taking place on April 16.