

SHEEP

August 2024

Grassland management

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CHECK IF

2024

is a year you need
to purchase a
qualifying ram
under the Sheep
Improvement
Scheme.



Make good decisions about how you prioritise your grass.

Prioritise the best grass available on the farm to lambs and thinner ewes where body condition score (BCS) needs to be improved before breeding. It is also important to focus on building grass reserves for the autumn/winter grazing period. The response to fertiliser generally declines in late August/early September, so get out early for best results. Aim to apply the last round of chemical fertiliser early in August once conditions are suitable. Ensure that you stay within the limits of the farm nutrient management plan.

DAFM reminder

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) wishes to remind



Check animal breeding notices before importing any germinal products.

farmers that there are strict legal requirements when importing germinal products of sheep (semen, oocytes or embryos) into the Republic of Ireland. Please consult the animal breeding notices on <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/412da-animal-breeding/#animal-breeding-notices>, or your local Regional Veterinary Office, for further detailed information.

Purchasing SIS-eligible rams

Check if 2024 is a year you need to purchase a qualifying ram under the Sheep Improvement Scheme (SIS). Ensure that the ram is SIS eligible on the day of purchase using the Sheep Ireland ram search facility or the sale catalogue. Aside from Scheme eligibility, the Sheep Ireland €urostar ratings provide valuable information. A ram intended as a terminal sire with high terminal index figures should have lower lambing difficulty, and progeny that will grow faster and ultimately be ready for slaughter quicker. If you choose a high-index ram to breed replacements from, you can expect



Do you need to purchase a qualifying ram?

daughters with lower mortality and higher litter sizes. It is important as always to thoroughly inspect and check all the physical traits of any ram prior to purchase.

Ram sale 2024

The Sheep Ireland LambPlus Elite Multi-Breed €uroStar annual ram sale takes place on Saturday, August 24, in Tullamore Mart, Co. Offaly. Over 500 rams are expected to be on offer and all entries will be five star on the replacement and/or terminal index. They will also be genotyped, SIS eligible and have DNA parentage verified.



Weaning lamb performance

EDEL O'CONNOR and ANNE BIGGINS, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway, report on INZAC and breeding flocks at Athenry.

RESEARCH UPDATE

All lambs in the INZAC flock were weaned on June 11 at approximately 96 days of age. Average weaning weights for the four groups were 36.0kg (New Zealand), 34.0kg (High Irish), 31.8kg (Low Irish), and 35.4kg (NZ x High Irish). Lambs' average growth rate ranged from 273g/day to 313g/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 was scanned in early July, after which we selected our replacement ewe and ram lambs, and started drafting lambs for slaughter. At this point all ewes have been thoroughly examined and cross-checked against



Lambs after weaning.

lambling records in order to make culling decisions and avoid holding on to problem ewes within the flock. 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.

Biosecurity for bought-in stock

The risk of buying in animals carrying infectious diseases or resistant parasites should not be underestimated. Typically, August is a month when rams, hoggets and store lambs come on to the farm. A closed flock, where only rams are purchased, significantly reduces this risk, but it is important to be aware that sheep

taken home unsold from market, or those returning from shows, can potentially bring disease back to the farm. Consult with your veterinary practitioner to come up with a set of practical steps to be taken with incoming sheep, with the aim of not introducing any new health issues to the flock.



Keeping a close eye on parasites

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre reports on testing lambs and weaning on the BETTER sheep farms.

BETTER FARM UPDATE



Be careful to dose based on egg counts and resistance tests.

Internal parasite burdens have been monitored across the flocks since early June, with farms submitting faecal egg samples from lambs every two to three weeks. Lambs are then dosed based on the faecal egg counts and the results of previous drench resistance tests. Worm burdens rose across most of the flocks in late June/early July, with farms having to dose with either a yellow (2-LV: levamisole) or clear (3-ML: macrocyclic lactone)

anthelmintic. However, there has been significant variation between farms due to location, system and intensity, demonstrating the importance of each individual farm using faecal egg counts to make decisions. The hill flocks are weaning lambs this month, while the lowland flocks have begun preparations for breeding. It can take eight to ten weeks to put on a full BCS unit in a ewe, so flocks lambing in early March are already inside this window. The BETTER farms have separated and clearly marked thin ewes. These were carefully checked for any obvious issues (mouth, lameness, etc.), and are getting preferential access to grass from now until mating. Ewes that fail to regain sufficient BCS will be culled.

BETTER Sheep/Signpost farm walk

There is a farm walk on the farm of Tomas O'Toole, Maumfin, Moyard, Clifden, Co. Galway, H91 PXN2, at 7.00pm on Thursday, August 8.