

SHEEP

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Grassland demand ramps up

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*The majority of
March lambs can
consume 1-1.2kg
DM per day now.*

Grass demand has been increasing. By June most March-born lambs will be eating 1-1.2kg DM per day, and competing with ewes for the best pasture. Aim for a pre-grazing yield of 1,250-1,500kg DM/ha, or 7-9cm, grazing to a residual of 4.5cm. Target a short residency period during June, e.g., three to four days per paddock. Achieve this by reducing grazing area with temporary divisions, increasing grazing group size, or including cattle. Depending on demand, fertiliser applications should continue in June, with a guideline of a further 12-18kg/ha (10-15 units/acre). Split applications may be wise depending on stocking rate. Many farms had to graze silage late on, and harvest has been delayed, which may impact on silage quality. Plan to cut about six to seven weeks after closing up, with a suitable level of fertiliser.



TARGET YIELD

AIM FOR A
PRE-GRAZING
YIELD OF

**1,250-
1,500kg
DM/ha**

or 7-9cm grass.

Are blowfly control measures in place?

Implement protective measures in time, before blowfly strike occurs. Having these in place early will help reduce the fly population on your farm and the risk for later in the season. Be aware of how different products work, the period of

cover they provide and withdrawal date, especially when treating forward lambs. Ewes will need to be treated in a timely manner post shearing. Correct application procedure is essential to product efficacy.

Plans for weaning

It's time to start planning for where the freshly weaned lambs and ewes will be grazed. Having access to bare paddock for ewes and high-quality grass for lambs will require some planning. Keep on top of health issues by having treatments in place for internal and external parasites, and lameness. Do your vaccinations, and have mineral supplementation (where needed) up to date prior to weaning to reduce any setbacks. Most flocks should aim to have their lambs weaned by 14 weeks of age. In certain cases, weaning lambs earlier, i.e., from 10 to 12 weeks of age, is a useful



Most flocks should wean lambs by 14 weeks of age.

management tool. This is particularly helpful with yearling ewes or thin ewes to allow them extra time to recover condition. It also has the potential to benefit farms in areas prone to drought to reduce overall feed demand earlier and enable them to prioritise grazing for weaned lambs.

Shearing

Having some preparation in place before shearing will make the process easier on all involved and help improve the quality of the wool harvested. Here are some areas to consider.

1. Sheep must be dry for shearing. Where necessary, house on slats or on bedding that has accumulated over a winter, as opposed to bedding on fresh straw, as it will get stuck in the fleece.
2. Fast beforehand and separate lambs from ewes before shearing.
3. Remove dags.
4. Ensure there is no straw or shavings in the holding pen, as this can stick to the fleece and more than halve returns.
5. Keep coloured fleeces separate when packing.



Variable growth rates

FRANK CAMPION, of the Teagasc Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway, reports on growth rates in the BETTER sheep flocks.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Grass growth rates improved in May, as did grass utilisation, helping the BETTER sheep farms to get grazing rotations and management plans in full swing. Some farms have dropped out paddocks with heavy covers for silage to keep control of grass supplies and keep quality grass in front of ewes and lambs. Current targets are to have ewes and lambs going into swards at 8-9cm and out at 4cm. Where possible, dry ewes are being used to clean out paddocks and to keep ewes and lambs moving to fresh grass.

Weighing

All lowland farms had their lambs weighed in May at approximately seven weeks of age. Lamb growth rates for five



Some farms took out heavy covers as silage to keep grass supply under control.

of the lowland flocks are presented in **Table 1**. Growth rates are variable between and within the flocks. This is being investigated but the difficult weather at lambing and during April is a key factor.

Flocks where ewe body condition score (BCS) was below target at lambing have been hit hardest, as these ewes didn't have sufficient body reserves to produce milk to maximise lamb growth rates.

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	5.7 (4.8-6.2)	330 (287-380)	22.3 (20.2-26.7)
2	5.0 (4.2-5.6)	254 (228-274)	17.9 (16.6-20.3)
3+*	4.4 (4.0-4.6)	233 (180-248)	16.4 (12.5-17.6)

*Born as triplets and reared as twins.



Increasing grass growth after a slow start

RESEARCH UPDATE

EDEL O'CONNOR and ANNE BIGGINS of Teagasc AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway, report on the INZAC and breeding flocks at Teagasc Athenry.

Grass growth has jumped in recent weeks, with an average growth rate of 74kg DM/ha throughout May. All grazing paddocks are now being sub-divided for grazing to ensure that they are being grazed out properly and allowing for fresh regrowth. As a result, ewes and lambs are spending approximately three to four days in each section.



Dosing decisions throughout the summer will be based on routine FECPAK results.

Performance

Lamb performance for the period 0-10 weeks is presented in Table 2. All lambs received a dose at six weeks for nematodirus. Lamb faecal samples are currently being collected and monitored via FECPAK every fortnight. Our dosing decisions throughout the summer will be

based on routine FECPAK results. We will include further updates in this section of the newsletter. Lambs have received their vaccinations for clostridia and pasteurella, which were given at six weeks and the second dose at 10 weeks.

We are measuring methane output from our lactating ewes using portable accumulation chambers. We are also estimating the dry matter intake of the ewes at grass to determine the link between methane output and ewe intake. Further measurements will be taken on these ewes during the dry period.

Table 2: Lamb performance for the period 0-10 weeks.

	NZ	Elite Irish	Irish Low	NZ x Elite Irish
10-week performance				
Liveweight (kg)	28.0	26.7	25.0	27.8
Average daily gain (g/day)	325	315	284	331