

# SHEEP

May 2024

## Grassland



*Keep high-quality grass in front of lambs and ewes as much as possible.*

Flock performance is at its best when a constant supply of fresh high-quality grass is available to ewes and lambs. If grazing group size is not sufficient to graze out an area in three to four days, you can increase group size. Where this is not practical, temporary electric fencing should be used to subdivide paddocks.

Where overall grass supply is adequate, take out covers over 8cm as silage bales. Despite the poor weather you should still harvest first-cut silage in late May, especially where lower chemical nitrogen (N) levels were spread. If in doubt contact your advisor before harvesting to test grass for nitrate and sugar levels.

EDITED BY  
DAMIAN COSTELLO,  
SHEEP SPECIALIST



DON'T MISS THE  
**May 21**

deadline to apply  
online for the new  
Sheep Welfare  
Scheme worth  
€8/ewe.



## Safety in mind at this busy time

Delayed spring field work combined with silage making and other field operations will increase machinery use. Drive at a speed that is appropriate and be vigilant of hazards like blind spots. You must have a clear view as

you enter/exit public roads. Talk to your contractor in advance to plan work and inform them of hazards. Keep children and people not involved in work clear of moving machinery. Tidy farmyards will help.

## HEALTH & SAFETY



*Keep children away from machinery.*

## National Sheep Welfare Scheme

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has opened a new National Sheep Welfare Scheme (NSWS) with a payment rate of €8 per eligible ewe. The Scheme runs separately to the Sheep Improvement Scheme (SIS), and all intending applicants need to apply online via their Agfood.ie portal or through their authorised agricultural agent before May 21. The application screen is pre-populated

with the payable number of ewes and this can be adjusted down if applicable. Applicants must select two tasks to complete on their eligible ewes from:

1. Shearing or body condition scoring.
2. Clostridial vaccination or plunge dipping.

Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/b253f-national-sheep-welfare-scheme/>.

## Flock health

Lambs born in early March have probably been dosed for nematodirus. For later lambs, treat with a white drench at five to six weeks once they are eating enough grass to ingest the infective larvae, or when any symptoms like scouring occur.

Avoid any setback in lamb performance due to scald. Early intervention is key. A whole flock approach is best. Footbathing all sheep in a 10% zinc or copper sulphate solution will treat and prevent scald.



## Results from lambing

PHILIP CREIGHTON of Teagasc AGRIC, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on lambing the Sheep Research Demonstration Farm.

## RESEARCH UPDATE

Lambing commenced on February 29 and ended on March 31. Around 90% of the flocks lambd over the first 17 days. Birth weights for singles, twins and triplets averaged 5.8kg, 4.9kg and 4.0kg, respectively. Lamb mortality is averaging 11%. We are averaging 1.75 lambs per ewe. In all, 17% of ewes required lambing assistance. Average ewe body condition score (BCS) going to grass was 3.2. Lambs were



weighed at four weeks and average daily gain is 285g/head/day. Grass covers at the start of March had improved, but continued poor weather delayed N applications until mid to late March. This resulted in below normal grass growth and poor regrowth. We supplemented ewes at grass post turn-out to stretch grass supplies and maintain dry matter intake, and subdivided paddocks to maximise regrowth.

## Flukicide residues in lamb carcasses

Flukicides have been used for years to prevent and treat liver fluke. National Residue Control Plan testing has detected residues of flukicides (often containing Closantel) in ovine carcasses. Subsequent on-farm follow-up investigations identified the following issues:

- overdosing with flukicides;
- lack of adherence to withdrawal periods of flukicide; and,
- information relating to treatment history, especially date of treatment and relevant withdrawal period, not provided to the purchaser.

### Summary of key take home messages:

- read product literature for dose rates and meat withdrawal periods;
- shake bottle well before use;
- do not treat animals nearing slaughter;
- use correct dose – weigh animals;
- it is a legal requirement to pass on information to buyers at sale time regarding treatments;
- protect food safety and health by using medicines properly; and,
- report adverse drug reactions to your vet or on the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) website.



## Analysing performance

### BETTER FARM UPDATE

FRANK CAMPION, of Teagasc AGRIC Athenry, Co. Galway takes us through what's happening on the BETTER sheep farms.

On the lowland farms, ewes and lambs are grouped into their main grazing groups. Seven-week weights are being collected and will indicate how the difficult weather has affected lamb performance. Assess lambing now to see what changes can be made for next year. When dosing or weighing lambs, identify ewes that are not rearing good lambs with a view to culling. Even the top-performing BETTER farms will have ewes that fail to perform.

### Return to normal?

At the time of writing, weather conditions are settling, allowing fertiliser to be spread and the grazing rotation to be properly established. Grass growth is accelerating at this time of year, so all the farms will be relying on temporary grazing infrastructure and data from grass measuring to ensure grass supply and quality are maintained. They will



*The BETTER farms will be making silage this month.*

also be making silage. Keeping grass quality correct will have a big impact on performance to weaning and the drafting pattern post weaning. Lambs on the lowland flocks were treated for nematodirus in April using a white drench. Where some of the lambs were still quite young at the time, a second dose may be necessary. Faecal sampling of lambs will begin later this month to allow for FECPAK analysis to establish when further anthelmintic treatments are required.