

# SHEEP

October 2024

## Grassland management

EDITED BY  
MICHAEL GOTTSTEIN,  
HEAD OF SHEEP  
KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER



**MARCH-  
LAMBING  
FLOCKS  
NEED AT  
LEAST**

**20%**

**of the grazing area  
closed by the end  
of October.**



*Ensure paddocks are grazed out fully to allow light down to the base of the sward.*

Plan grass supply for spring 2025 now. March-lambing flocks need to have at least 20% of the grazing area closed by the end of October. Identify the fields that you will be grazing first next spring, e.g., dry sheltered fields closest to the yard. These should be the first areas closed. Continue to close up ground in rotation with a further 20% being closed every two weeks. Ensure that paddocks are grazed out fully to allow light down to the base of the sward. Don't regrazed areas that have been closed up. The grass will be much more valuable as feed for lactating ewes in the spring time.

## Parasites

### Stomach worms

We have seen very high worm egg counts in lambs over the last two months. When dosing lambs, it is a good idea to take faecal egg counts (FECs) seven days post treatment for yellow wormers (levamisole) or 14 days post treatment for white (benzimidazole) or clear (macrocyclic lactone) wormers. If the count has not gone down to zero you need to investigate why. Talk to your vet or advisor.

### *Haemonchus contortus* – barber's pole worm

This worm causes disease in all age groups, i.e., mature animals do not develop immunity. In most cases, the first sign of the disease is dead sheep. The regional veterinary laboratories are reporting more and more cases of this parasite. Affected sheep become anaemic, do not scour and may have a bottle jaw appearance. Farmers taking regular FECs can identify the issue early as the parasite lays huge numbers of eggs, and we generally see egg counts in the

thousands rather than hundreds. Certain flukicides are effective against this parasite, and by treating affected adult sheep and monitoring the reduction in FECs, we can identify the presence of the parasite.

### External parasites

External parasites such as scab, lice and ticks are best controlled by plunge dipping. For dipping to be effective the following conditions need to be met.

1. There is a clean dip bath and fresh dip solution made up at the beginning.
2. Each sheep needs to stay in the dip bath for at least 60 seconds. The longer they are in the bath the longer the period of protection against reinfection will be.
3. The solution needs to be topped up after every 36 sheep. Even if the volume of water doesn't reduce, the active ingredient in the bath is binding to the wool and reducing.
4. Keep dipped sheep and dip wash away from watercourses.

## Grant for PTO shaft covers

Reminder – the National Farm Safety Measure 2024 provides a financial contribution for up to four PTO shaft covers. Closing date for applications is November 1. For further information talk to your advisor or go to: [www.gov.ie/farmsafety](http://www.gov.ie/farmsafety).

### Plan for winter housing of animals

It is important to make a list of repairs needed and plan to get them done in preparation for winter housing. Farm maintenance drives farm efficiency, saves time and labour, and improves safety.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY



Apply for a PTO shaft cover grant now.

## Lamb finishing/store lambs

Considering options for finishing lambs or purchasing store lambs? The Teagasc Store Lamb Calculator is available at the following link:

<https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/sheep/financial-management/>.

## Mating management

Key points for successful mating are:

- rams that are in good body condition have higher levels of libido (desire to mate);
- ideal ewe-to-ram ratios are 45:1 for mature rams and 25:1 for ram lambs;
- three or more rams per mating group will help to guard against infertility and blocker rams;
- raddle is cheap and the best insurance policy against empty ewes at scanning time – change the colour every two weeks, and start with the lighter colours first (yellow>orange>green>red>blue>black);
- lame sheep are a big problem during the mating season – treat lame ewes and rams promptly;
- infections that increase body temperature will render the ram temporarily infertile – be conscious of this for rams that have been purchased close to the breeding season; and,
- details of star-rated rams (including Sheep Improvement Scheme (SIS)-eligible rams) can be found on the Sheep Ireland website: [www.ramsearch.ie](http://www.ramsearch.ie).

## FEC testing shows its value

**FRANK CAMPION**, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry takes a look at the BETTER farms' battle with parasites.

FECs rose sharply on some of the BETTER farms in late August/early September, requiring the owners to go in with anthelmintic drenches to lambs. Equally, some flocks' egg counts remained comparatively low and rose at a slower rate. This shows again the benefits in using FECs to decide when to worm dose lambs to ensure they are dosed on time and correctly. Ewes will be joined with the rams this month on the lowland flocks for a



maximum of six weeks. Some farms will pull the rams out after five weeks (two full mating cycles). On the hill flocks, most lambs intended for sale as stores are gone and remaining lambs are being finished for slaughter. Grass supplies on the green ground on these farms is being built and prioritised with mating next month. This is also to try to help ewes regain BCS pre mating or for grazing ewes while they are with the ram.

**BETTER FARM  
UPDATE**

# Mating underway for 2025 season

## RESEARCH UPDATE

FIONA MCGOVERN, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on mating on the INZAC and breeding flocks at Athenry.

Grass growing conditions have remained steady since my last update. Average growth over the past few weeks has been 55kg DM/day, with 26 days ahead. Having a surplus at this time of year is welcome as our grazing pressure increases with multiple mating groups. We are building grass supplies to carry us through to housing in December. Importantly, we will also concentrate on closing paddocks to ensure that there will be enough grass for ewes after lambing next year. Grassland will need a rest period of 120 days over the winter, which means we need to begin closing paddocks from October 15.

### Breeding preparation

As we go to print, the INZAC Suffolk and Texel ewes are being sponged using Chronogest sponges and will receive an injection of 400iu PMSG prior to artificial insemination, which is due to take place on October 2 and 8. All ewes have been weighed, body condition scored and divided into mating groups. As we use approximately 30 rams across the flock for mating, it is important that all ewes are allocated correctly to their mating group. Each of our ewes is artificially inseminated



*Grassland is being closed to ensure there is enough for lambs and ewes next spring.*

using fresh semen and subsequently run with rams for up to two repeat cycles. Inbreeding analysis is carried out across all of our flock to ensure there is no interrelationship between ewes and rams at mating. Prior to mating, rams receive 500g of concentrates per head per day to ensure they reach a body condition score (BCS) target of 3.5-4.0 at mating. Following CT scanning and measuring of methane output the majority of our cull lambs were slaughtered in September. Loin samples were collected from the carcasses and will be assessed for their sensory attributes; ultimately investigating if the genetic merit of the animal impacts the perceived taste of the meat produced. The remainder of the lambs continue to graze ahead of the ewes in a leader-follower system. Since mid September our lighter lambs are receiving concentrate supplementation at 350g/head/day.