

SHEEP

February 2025

Winter growth and fertiliser application

EDITED BY
CIARAN LYNCH,
SHEEP SPECIALIST



Pay attention to fertiliser spreading dates for your area.

Over the winter, growth has been good in closed paddocks, which should provide flocks with a strong start following turnout. For those planning to spread fertiliser, pay close attention to the spreading dates as they vary between zones A, B, and C.

For the first round of application, using protected urea apply between 15kg and 25kg nitrogen (N)/ha (one-third to half a bag per acre) depending on demand, if and when conditions are suitable.

SOIL
TEMPERATURES
SHOULD BE

6°C

and rising for growth.

Key considerations for applying fertiliser:

- soil temperature: a minimum of 6°C and rising is required for growth;
- avoid wet soils: do not spread on wet soils to prevent N loss and soil damage – ensure heavy rainfall is not forecast within at least 48 hours of application; and,

- target fields: prioritise fields with a high perennial ryegrass content and grass covers greater than 500kg DM/ha (approximately 5cm). Fields with lower grass covers should be targeted for slurry or farmyard manure (FYM) application, where available.

Sheep Census deadline

Postal submissions for the Sheep Census are now closed. However, online submissions remain open until February 14, 2025. To complete the process, log into your [agfood.ie](https://www.agfood.ie) account

or use the AIM services app. Avoid leaving this task until the last minute, as it is a legal requirement and a condition for eligibility in various sheep-related schemes.

Investigating problems

Health issues often increase in the weeks leading up to lambing. If you notice problems such as abortion in ewes or increased mortality during this period, do the following:

- contact your vet promptly to address the issue; and,
- submit samples to your local Regional Veterinary Laboratory to identify the cause.



Carefully examine any health issues in your flock.

Although some issues may be too late to address during the current lambing season, identifying the cause can help you implement plans to reduce or eliminate their recurrence in future lambing periods.

Dates for your diary

- The Teagasc National Hill Sheep Conference takes place on Wednesday, February 19 at 7.00pm in the Park Hotel, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, X35 CC9.
- Let's Talk Sheep webinar – Wednesday, February 12 at 8.00pm – Practical tips to

make lambing easier. Register at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/letstalksheep/>, or by scanning the QR code. Previous webinars are also available to view at this link.



Scanning rates on target

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway looks at the results from pregnancy scanning on some of the lowland BETTER sheep farms.

The scan rates and scanned litter sizes for the farms that have pregnancy scanned at the time of writing are presented in **Table 1**. Scanning and pregnancy rates have for the most part been acceptable so far based on the past performance of the flocks. Ewes were also body condition scored at pregnancy scanning and thin ewes were marked and separated for additional feeding. A general check on flock health was also carried out, with the main issue being lameness. All ewes were foot bathed to reduce the spread of lameness prior to housing. Lam e ewes were examined, the



Steps were taken to reduce the spread of lameness.

condition diagnosed and the appropriate treatment administered with veterinary consultation where necessary. If possible lame sheep were put into a separate group until cured to reduce the risk of spreading the lameness.

Table 1: Mature ewe scanning results from five of the lowland BETTER farms 2024/25.

Farm	Forde	Gavin	Keane	Moore	Cassidy
Location	Galway	Carlow	Wexford	Roscommon	Monaghan
Scanned litter size	1.82	1.9	1.88	1.96	1.88
Scanned pregnancy rate (%)	93.4	98.8	96.6	97.3	91.8
Scanning rate	1.7	1.88	1.82	1.9	1.72

Slurry and calving/lambing safety

With slurry, evacuate all animals and ventilate before you agitate.

Select a breezy day and open all doors and outlets to provide a draught. Keep people away from the shed and agitation point for at least 40 minutes after starting. Keep the tank opening secure at all times. Beware of gas in buildings that are linked by tanks or drainage channels.

Keep safe during calving and lambing. Use calving/lambing gates and pens. Keep a physical barrier between you and a calving cow at all times.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Flock biosecurity

Every animal introduced to a flock or person working with stock poses a potential risk, particularly during the lambing period when infectious agents are more easily spread.

Important considerations:

- avoid unnecessary purchases: while buying pet lambs to put on ewes or foster ewes to rear may seem like a quick solution, it can introduce significant health risks – the health of your flock is only as good as the worst flock from which you purchase sheep;
- protect helpers: individuals assisting during lambing should use protective equipment (e.g., gloves) to safeguard their health and prevent bringing infectious agents from other farms; and,
- maintain hygiene: set up proper disinfection points and ensure helpers (e.g., students) use overalls and/or waterproofs on your farm to maintain biosecurity.



The health of your flock is only as good as the worst flock from which you purchase sheep.

Teagasc/FBD Environmental Sustainability AWARDS 2025

Prize Fund: €30,000

Promoting environmentally sustainable farming and recognising the progress that farmers are making to lighten the load of farming on the environment, while continuing to produce high quality, nutritious food, in a profitable manner.

**Closing Date
6th March 2025**

Scan the QR code to apply!



For further information or to access other enterprise newsletters, please contact your local Teagasc advisor or see www.teagasc.ie.



Printed using vegetable-based inks and FSC-certified paper.