

SHEEP

January 2025

Grassland management

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Don't be tempted to graze closed ground now – it will be invaluable in spring.

Wishing our readers a happy new year. The relatively mild temperatures have seen good grass growth on closed ground during November and December. This will be invaluable to ewes and lambs in spring, so do not be tempted to graze this grass now. If ground conditions allow, January can be a good time to apply lime as per soil analysis for the farm.



**EWE
CONCENTRATE
SHOULD BE**

**19-
20%**

**crude protein (CP)
using high-energy
ingredients with soya
bean meal as the
main protein source.**

Submit your Sheep Census

All sheep farmers are obliged to carry out a Sheep Census on December 31 each year and submit details to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). The closing date for submitting your Sheep Census by post is January 31, 2025. Online submission of sheep number details is

possible up to February 14, 2025 by logging into your www.agfood.ie account or using the AIM services app. Don't put this important task on the long finger as along with being a legal requirement, it is also a condition of eligibility for the various sheep-related schemes.

Feed ewes based on scanned litter size

If not already done, carry out a representative forage analysis to determine your silage quality. The forage feed value combined with expected litter size determines the required amount of concentrate supplementation per ewe. The concentrate should be made up of 19-20% crude protein (CP) using high-energy ingredients with soya bean meal as the main protein source. After scanning, group ewes in pens based on expected litter size and implement a stepped concentrate feeding plan based on forage quality (consult your advisor). Commence supplementation in

time, in particular for triplets (or greater), eight to 10 weeks from expected



Group ewes based on expected litter size.

lambing date. Assess body condition score (BCS) of ewes at scanning. Separate any thin ewes for extra feeding – as with triplet-bearing ewes, start in time. Good feeding management of both forage and concentrates is advised.

Upcoming events

Teagasc National Lowland Sheep Conferences

- Tuesday, January 28, Ard Rí House Hotel, Tuam, Co. Galway H54 V267; and,
- Thursday, January 30, Knightsbrook Hotel, Trim, Co. Meath C15WYF4.

Both conferences start at 7.00pm. Refreshments will be served afterwards. Booking or registration is not required. Free to attend. Further details at: www.teagasc.ie/sheepcon25.

Let's Talk Sheep webinars

- Wednesday, January 15, 8.00pm – flock health and blue tongue; and,
- Wednesday, February 12, 8.00pm – practical tips to make lambing easier.

Register at: <https://www.teagasc.ie/letstalksheep/>. Previous webinars are also available to view at this link.

INZAC experiment's final year

RESEARCH UPDATE

FIONA MCGOVERN, of AGRIC, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway reports on what's in store for the INZAC flock for 2025, as the experiment comes to a close.

2025 marks the end of phase II of our INZAC experiment, which will see the study finish. Rams were removed from ewes at the end of November after a six-week mating period following artificial insemination. Currently, repeat numbers seem low, with a total of 6.5% repeat matings recorded across all groups. We are eagerly awaiting our pregnancy scan data but going by the previous three years, we are expecting the New Zealand and New Zealand x Elite Irish ewes to have higher scan rates than both the Elite and Low genetic merit Irish groups. As of mid December, all of our ewes were housed and our annual grass growth for 2024 was averaging 9t/ha, which is lower than in previous years but not surprising given the poor growing conditions in 2024.

Silage analysis

Silage samples have been collected and are being sent for analysis, which along with ewe BCS and scan rate will facilitate nutritional management decisions for the late pregnancy period. All ewes were weighed, had BCS collected and were foot bathed prior to housing, with ewes shorn approximately one week post housing. At that stage



Silage samples have been collected and sent for testing.

ewes were averaging 78kg liveweight; however, more importantly, BCS was good with an average of 3.75 for all ewes. This will be monitored again after pregnancy scanning and taken into account when feeding ewes in late pregnancy. As part of the INZAC flock in 2025 we will be monitoring the methane output of ewes using GreenFeed technology. Ewes will be monitored throughout the grazing season (March to November). This will enable us to obtain an overall picture of methane output throughout the year and while ewes are at grazing. Data will be collected daily with feed intake of ewes monitored on three occasions (spring, summer and autumn). Finally, from all here at the INZAC flock, Teagasc Athenry, we would like to wish you a very happy new year.

Getting feeding right

FRANK CAMPION, of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on pre-lambing nutrition on the BETTER sheep farms.

The focus for the midseason lambing flocks in the programme will be on pre-lambing feeding plans. All of the farms took silage samples in November and the results are summarised in Table 1. On average the figures are similar to last year, but there are differences in ranges in DMD, etc., between batches of silage on the farms. This is particularly evident at the

upper end of the scale where the farms struggled to achieve 75+ DMD silage this year. Silage analysis will be combined with fodder budgets and used to draw up feeding plans for ewes in the final six to eight weeks pre lambing, with the highest-quality silage targeted at the pregnant ewes to try and reduce the quantities of concentrates required.

Table 1: Results from silage quality tests on baled silage on the Teagasc BETTER sheep farms.

	2024			2023 mean	Diff. 2024 vs. 2023
	Mean	Min.	Max.		
DM (%)	33.7	18.7	68.5	34.3	-0.6
Protein (% DM)	12.2	7.8	16.5	12.9	-0.7
UFL	0.85	0.74	0.92	0.84	0.01
DMD (% DM)	69.0	62.1	74.9	69.5	-0.4

Start 2025 with health and safety in mind

As we start 2025, put safety and health front and centre. Pay attention to moving vehicles, such as tractors, teleporters and ATVs. Risks associated with livestock, slurry handling and avoiding falls from heights must also be closely managed. Take time now to review your risk assessment document and plan any necessary actions.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Review your risk assessment document now.