

SHEEP

June 2025

Grassland management

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KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER



We saw rapid grass growth during May, which must be managed.

Grass covers grew rapidly during May. On many farms, we have seen grass covers rising fast and in many situations the days ahead, which is a simple measure of how many days of grass is on the farm (if grass stopped growing), have risen well above the target of 12-14 days. If grass on the farm is getting ahead of stock, it is important to react swiftly and remove surpluses as they arise. Don't wait for surplus grass to develop into a heavy cut before harvesting, as the ground will take too long to come back into the grazing rotation. Very dry farms or organic farms may need to keep slightly higher levels of grass in case of reduced grass growth as a result of drought, etc.



THE TARGET
NUMBER OF
DAYS AHEAD
FOR GRASS IS

12-14.

Silage harvesting

Good silage from a sheep perspective is leafy grass that is well preserved. To achieve this the following steps should be taken:

- harvest grass at a leafy stage before it starts heading out;
- avoid soil contamination by raising the mower blades if ground is uneven or wet;
- wilt the grass by tedding – ensure tedder tines are set so they do not dig into the soil and contaminate the silage;



Harvest grass at a leafy stage before it starts heading out.

- for baled silage, take care during transport to prevent damage to the wrap and patch any holes/tears as soon as possible; and,
- store bales in a location away from livestock and protect from vermin.

Preparing for weaning

The optimum time for lambs to suckle ewes is approximately 100 days or 14 weeks. Leaving lambs suckling for longer is counterproductive, as the ewes will compete with the lambs for grass, while not adding much to the diet of the lamb in terms of milk. Prior to weaning lambs, plan your rotation so that you have good quality grass in the best fenced areas to

hold the lambs immediately post weaning. Ewes should be confined in a well-fenced paddock for a seven- to ten-day period. Do not overdo the 'drying off' process. One of the biggest challenges facing many farmers is having ewes in good condition at mating time. Consequently, the dry period should be used to get ewes to gain weight, not lose it.

Shearing

Where shearing is yet to happen, consider the following steps to make life easier and improve the quality of the fleece harvest:

1. Sheep must be dry for shearing. Where necessary, house on slats or on bedding that has accumulated over winter, as opposed to bedding on fresh straw, as it will get stuck in the fleece. Most flocks should wean lambs by 14 weeks of age.
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.

Stomach worm control

In June, we start to see a notable increase in midseason round worms. These are the parasites that significantly reduce animal performance and it is with these parasites that we see the big issues with anthelmintic resistance.

Growth and mortality improve

FRANK CAMPION, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation

Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway looks at lamb and grass growth on the BETTER sheep farms.

The first look at lamb performance this year is currently underway, with the seven-week weights being collected from the lowland flocks. Lamb growth rates and lamb mortality rates are better than this time last year at first look, but a detailed analysis will take place. Grass growth rates, while initially slow on some of the farms, have accelerated in recent weeks. Some of the farms have been cutting heavy paddocks for silage to

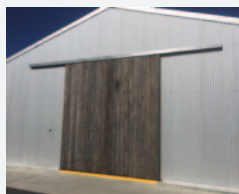
maintain sward quality for ewes and lambs, but there is a close eye being kept on growth demand to ensure grass supplies are kept balanced. The target for this time of year is to have ewes and lambs going into swards at 8-9cm and out at approximately 4.5cm. Where possible, dry ewes (replacement hoggets, etc.) are being used to clean out paddocks and to keep ewes and lambs moving to fresh grass.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Expanded wear and tear scheme

The expanded Acceleration of Wear and Tear Allowances for Farm Safety Equipment Scheme

was launched recently. Farmers can avail of capital allowances of 50% per annum to be claimed over an accelerated two-year period for listed investments. The expanded list of eligible items now also includes fixed sheep/cattle handling units, cow calving gates, floodlights for farmyards, livestock monitors, and sliding or roller doors. These complement the 60% grant aid, which is available under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme 3 (TAMS 3) for safety-related investments. Talk to your advisor to discuss in more detail.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

Eligible items now include sliding doors.

Sunshine during a busy May

RESEARCH UPDATE

ANNE BIGGINS, PhD student, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway tells us about the latest from the INZAC and breeding flocks.

Since my last update in April, grass growth has increased, with an average growth rate of 80kg DM/ha throughout May. As a result, we cut 17% of each farmlet as baled silage in early May. 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.

Lambs have also received their vaccinations for clostridia and pasteurella, which were given at six weeks and the second dose at 10 weeks, following manufacturer instructions. We are measuring methane output from our lactating ewes using portable



Teagasc Athenry is examining methane output from lactating ewes.

accumulation chambers and GreenFeed machines. We are 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.

Date for your diary – Sheep 2025

Sheep 2025 takes place at Teagasc, Athenry on Saturday, June 21. Gates open at 10.00am. This will be the largest dedicated sheep industry event on the island of Ireland in 2025. It is a great day out for anyone with an interest in the Irish sheep industry. The event is free to attend and there is no requirement to book. On show

will be a whole host of technical exhibits, workshops, trade stands, sheep shows, health, safety and well-being exhibits, children's entertainment, cooking demonstration with Neven Maguire, and much much more. For more information, visit our website at: www.teagasc.ie/sheep2025.