

SHEEP

May 2023

Grassland management

Edited by
Damian Costello,
Sheep Specialist

The adverse weather in early April delayed fertiliser applications for first-cut silage. The general rule of thumb is that applied nitrogen (N) is used up at a rate of two units/day in good growing conditions – if in doubt contact your advisor before harvesting to test the grass for nitrate and sugar levels. The main factor

affecting silage feed value is crop maturity at harvesting, so the aim is to harvest before grass has headed out. Spreading heavier crops over the ground straight after mowing helps achieve a quick wilt. Where overall grass supply is adequate, covers higher than 8cm should be removed as surplus bales.

Keep a step ahead of lameness

The most common cause of lameness in lambs at this stage is scald, identifiable as an irritated area between the digits of the hoof. Early intervention is key as it will spread rapidly. In smaller flocks, individual treatment with topical

sprays will be possible but in general, a whole flock approach is best. If footbathing of the flock in a 10% zinc or copper sulphate solution is done correctly, there is an excellent response in the treatment and prevention of scald.

Date for the diary

SHEEP 2023: the largest dedicated sheep industry event of 2023 takes place on Saturday, June 17. Following on from very successful past events held on the Teagasc Athenry campus, this year's event will take

place in a new venue, Gurteen Agricultural College, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, E53 TP93. Further information is available at this link: <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/national-events/events/sheepopenday-gurteen.php>.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Identifying best practice

TIM KEADY AND BRÍD MCCLEARN of Teagasc, Athenry, Co. Galway report on the EuroSheep network, and how it is helping to identify best practices to improve flock health and nutrition.

EuroSheep is a thematic network on sheep production funded by the EU. The overall aim of EuroSheep is to share knowledge between stakeholders to improve flock nutrition and health management across Europe. EuroSheep involves the six main EU sheep-producing countries (Ireland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Spain), along with Turkey and the UK. Many scientific and practical/innovative solutions already exist at local and national level but they are not widely transferred at the EU level or they need to be adapted to specific livestock farming systems. EuroSheep followed on from SheepNet, which aimed to increase sheep productivity and disseminate existing knowledge from the sheep sector. EuroSheep is based on a multi-actor and transdisciplinary approach involving researchers, farmers and all stakeholders in the sheep sector. During the three years of the project, EuroSheep followed a five-step programme. Each step has been formalised by a transnational workshop, either on Zoom (due to Covid restrictions) or in a host country, which provided great opportunities



to share knowledge within and between EuroSheep countries.

Initially an EU-wide survey was undertaken to identify the main needs/issues of stakeholders to improving flock nutrition and health management. The main needs identified by stakeholders were similar across many countries. In relation to ewe nutrition, stakeholders identified knowledge of nutrient requirements, grazing management, forage feed value, and mineral and vitamin supplementation as their four main needs.

For lamb nutrition, the main needs identified were grazing management, lamb performance targets and knowledge of nutrient requirements. The main health needs/challenges identified were lameness, internal parasites and clostridial diseases.

In the second step, EuroSheep produced 92 solutions and 26 fact sheets to address stakeholder needs. In the third step, EuroSheep collected 52 tips and tricks, proposed by stakeholders for stakeholders, to facilitate implementation of solutions. The

fourth step involved communication and knowledge transfer using EuroSheep's social media, press releases, videos, website and workshops. A total of 51 national and transnational workshops were held over three years involving nearly 1,500 delegates. The final step involved collecting feedback from end users who implemented EuroSheep solutions. All of the implemented solutions were relevant and easy to carry out. A cost-benefit and sustainability analysis was undertaken on many of the implemented solutions.

In summary EuroSheep, which ends in June:

- involved eight countries representing 80% of the EU sheep population;
- held 46 national and five EU transnational workshops with nearly 1,500 delegates; and,
- collected stakeholder needs/questions on flock nutrition and health management and addressed these with:
 - 92 solutions;
 - 52 tips and tricks; and,
 - 26 fact sheets.

All results from EuroSheep are available on: www.eurosheep.network.

DAFM nematodirus forecast

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's (DAFM) nematodirus forecast suggested that peak egg hatching occurred for most of the country during the period of April 6-12. See the full document at this link: https://bit.ly/Nematodirus_Forecast_23.

Lambs born in early March or before should have been treated in late April. In later-lambing flocks, treat lambs with a white drench at five to six weeks of age, once they are eating sufficient quantities of grass to ingest the infective larvae, or as soon as any symptoms are observed.

HEALTH & SAFETY



Focus on safety at SHEEP 2023

SHEEP 2023 (Gurteen Agricultural College – June 17) will include a strong focus on health and safety for sheep farmers. Demonstrations will include: safe sheep handling practices and equipment; the new legislative requirement for training and PPE use when operating an ATV;

security on the farm; safe use of trailers; risks linked to vehicle blind spots; child safety; and, the importance of proactive management of mental and physical health. Advisors will also be available to provide additional information and guidance.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

Lamb performance

FRANK CAMPION of the Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway reports on grass growth and lamb performance on the BETTER sheep farms.

Lambing has concluded on the lowland flocks and post-lambing grazing rotations are in full swing, with ewes and lambs grouped-up into larger groups in order to reduce the number of groups on the farms. Grass growth rates were good for April but grazing conditions, particularly on the heavier farms, were challenging, especially early in the month. The second round of fertiliser was applied in April, which for most was 15-20 units of N per acre in the form of protected urea. Paddocks have also been identified for silage and where possible, these are now closed up and fertilised for silage. Getting good quality silage made this month and indeed throughout the summer will be a key part of managing concentrate costs next winter.

This is also a good time to review lambing performance, both of the stock but also the farm in terms of the set up going forward, e.g., do I need more individual pens? Were there enough sheltered paddocks closed off for turn out? Reviewing this now while it is fresh in the mind and making notes will benefit the farm going forward. One key area will be identifying the



Poor quality lambs can indicate ewes for culling.

poorer performing ewes for culling, either at lambing or those that bring in poor lambs at the seven-week weights this month. Data from previous years on the BETTER farms has shown that even the top-performing flocks will have a proportion of ewes that for one reason or another fail to perform. Culling the worst-performing ewes and not keeping replacements from them will improve overall flock performance over time.

Lambs were treated for nematodirus in April in line with the DAFM forecast using a white drench (benzimidazole; 1-BZ). Some of the flocks may need to dose a second time where some of the lambs were still quite young at the first dose. Faecal sampling of lambs will begin this month (May) to allow for FECPAK analysis to establish when further anthelmintic treatments are required.