Grassland management

October is the month to start planning for next year’s grass supply. Grass needs a 120-day rest period if you are to have a target of 6cm available for the ewes after lambing. Plan your rotation so that the fields that you are grazing out in mid to late October are the ones that you will be turning ewes out onto in the spring time. You should be closing your first fields about two to three weeks after ram turnout. Once fields are closed they should remain closed, no matter how much grass accumulates on them. This grass will be much more valuable in the spring time (Table 1).

Farmyard manure
All farmyard manure must be spread by October 31.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closing date</th>
<th>Percentage of ground closed</th>
<th>Grass available in spring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late October</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Early March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid November</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Mid March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late November</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Late March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid December</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Early April</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Target closing dates for a flock lambing in the first week of March.
Finishing lambs

When selecting a concentrate feed for fattening lambs, aim for a product that contains relatively high-quality ingredients. Cereals (barley, wheat, maize and oats) and pulps (beet pulp and citrus pulp) are good quality energy sources. By-products such as soya hulls and limited amounts of distillers, maize gluten and rapeseed are also useful ingredients. Soyabean meal is king in terms of a protein source, but it is relatively expensive, which should limit its inclusion level. If feeding lambs _ad lib_, then ensure that the ration contains 0.5% ammonium chloride to guard against urinary calculi in male lambs. As the winter approaches, the power is quickly going out of the grass. Meal feeding can be useful to give lambs an extra push where grass needs to be prioritised for the ewe flock. Where grass is in plentiful supply, lambs can be supplemented with concentrates at a rate of 0.5kg per head per day in troughs in the field. Where grass is needed for ewes, then consider housing lambs and finishing them on _ad lib_ concentrates with access to roughage (hay, straw or silage).

Guard against infertility

Any infection that raises a ram’s body temperature above 104°F (40°C) is likely to result in infertility for six to seven weeks post infection. The only way to ensure that rams are working properly is to raddle all rams for the entire mating season. If you see a lot of ewes repeating, you should introduce new rams. The two most common methods of applying raddle is by either using raddle paste (comes in powder form and must be mixed with oil) or a harness and crayon. Both options are suitable and relatively inexpensive. Start with the brighter colours, i.e., yellow followed by orange followed by green followed by red followed by blue, and finally black.

Get ready for winter

The clocks go back on October 29 as winter sets in. Firstly, check that your electrical safety switches or 32mA residual current devices (RCD) are tripping correctly. An Irish study indicates that 15% do not trip when tested. Consult the ESB Networks booklet – ‘Farm Safely with Electricity’ for further information. Check that farmyard lighting is adequate. Secondly, check that fire/smoke alarms in the home are in working order.
An optimistic start to the new year

Fiona McGovern, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Teagasc Athenry, Co. Galway with the latest on the INZAC Flock in Athenry.

Drafting of the 2017 lambs continues, with 86% drafted from the New Zealand group, 79% from the elite Irish group, and 62% from the low Irish group. Current lamb growth rates are in the region of 130-160g/day, while average liveweight of the remaining lambs is in the range of 35-43kg. We are drenching lambs fortnightly with cobalt, while continuing to monitoring lamb faecal egg counts (FECs) and ensuring to consult with the abattoir regarding the presence of liver fluke in slaughtered animals. While it is only September at time of writing, the current sheep production year is drawing to a close, with preparation and planning for the upcoming year in full swing. On the INZAC flock, all ewes are artificially inseminated (AI). The AI takes place over two days, with half of the ewes inseminated on each day. This year AI is scheduled to take place on October 4 and 11. It is a busy time for us, as we use all fresh semen, which is collected from over 25 rams on each day. Prior to AI, all ewes are heat synchronised using Chronogest sponges and receive an injection of 400iu PMSG.

As this newsletter goes to print, we are inserting sponges into the first half of the ewes. These will remain in place for 12 days and be removed 48 hours before AI. Cull ewes have been removed from the flock at this stage, while the remainder of ewes and hoggets have been weighed and had their body condition score (BCS) taken within the last week. Across groups, ewes are averaging 82kg and BCS 3.6. Grass growth has been good for this time of year, 60kg DM/ha/day, allowing us to build grass covers going into the autumn.

Importantly, as we mate ewes for the new season we are also concentrating on closing paddocks to ensure that there will be enough grass for ewes after lambing. Grassland will need a rest period of 120 days over the winter, which means we need to begin closing paddocks from October 15.
Mating experimentation

Frank Campion, Animal & Grassland Research and Innovation Centre, Athenry reports on mating tactics on the BETTER sheep farms.

Joining rams to ewes will begin in the midseason lowland flocks from early October (mostly between October 7 and 18), with most of the farms aiming to start lambing during the first week in March to match grass growth on the farm. The farms are reporting that ewe condition is generally good, with thin ewes separated off for preferential feeding prior to mating. All ewes and the replacements in the flock will be weighed and have their body BCS taken before joining, and those that have failed to improve in condition will be culled.

A number of the flocks will be using rams from the INZAC (Ireland New Zealand Animal Comparison) project this year, and single-sire mating will be used in order to evaluate the performance of the progeny off these rams. Single-sire mating groups will be combined into bigger groups or rams will swapped over after 17 days to mitigate the effects of subfertile or infertile rams.

All the farms, including the hill flock farms, have at this stage picked out their replacement ewe lambs, with some of the lowland farms planning to breed these this year. Given the wet weather and poor grass utilisation in parts during September, most of the farms intending to breed their ewe lambs are supplementing these to try to ensure that they don’t stop growing and flush lambs. The target will be to have all ewe lambs at a minimum of 60% of mature body weight at mating. Faecal egg counts will be carried out on these lambs, and if required, they will be dosed prior to mating also.

Grass

Grass growth rates in September were good generally, despite problems utilising this grass due to the wet weather in some areas.

Autumn time also signals the beginning of planning for next year’s grazing, with the farms starting to plan what order they intend to close up paddocks for next spring.

The target will be to start closing paddocks in rotation 120 days prior to target turn out date. For the flock in Co. Wexford, this process has already begun with a section of the farm marked off for the ewes due to lamb in January. These paddocks are being closed off already in order to ensure sufficient covers for mid January.