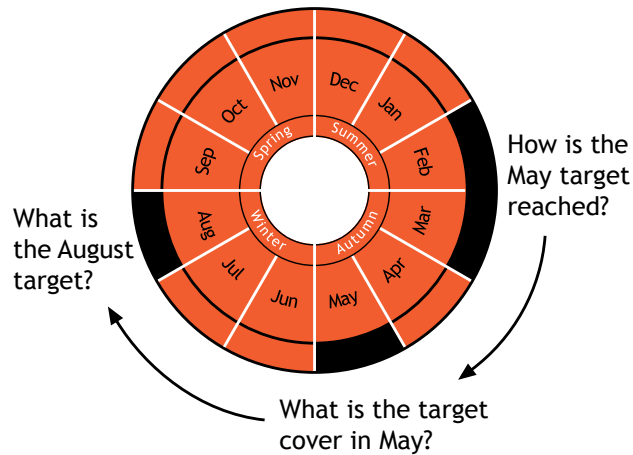


Building pasture cover for lambing

Summary

- The amount of pasture available in early spring influences the whole production cycle for the year ahead.
- Success lies in planning ahead, using three tactical reference points: the August target, the May target, and February/March decisions.

Key feed planning decisions



- Identify how much pasture cover is required at lambing/calving. This is the **August target**. The typical minimum for set stocked ewes is 1300-1500 kg DM/ha. For beef cows, it is 1500-1800 kg DM/ha.
- A winter feed budget will determine the cover needed at the start of winter to achieve the August target. This is the **May target**.
- Decisions need to be made as to what to do in autumn to achieve the May target. These are the **February/March decisions**.

Situations that could affect the planning process

1. **The stock selling policy jeopardizes the May target.** This should be avoided if possible. Without supplementation post-lambing, the cost will almost always be counted in ewe condition post-weaning, and thus conception the following year.
2. **An autumn drought halts growth.** Stock should be held in a sacrifice block, and fed supplements. This should be continued even after it rains to allow the farm cover to build up. New growth should not be grazed as it emerges because it is critical to pasture recovery.
3. **Ewes are overfed during winter and the August target is hit in July.** This situation should be avoided using feed rationing. Overfeeding ewes when they should be on maintenance usually leads to underfeeding post-lambing.
4. **Pasture growth fails to meet the budget.** Use N tactically in autumn and/or spring. Soil temperatures must be above 8°C (preferably above 10°C). N to reach target covers at or immediately post lambing has proved highly cost effective, especially with high fecundity ewes.

Pasture species and varieties

Sowing different pastures can assist cover at lambing in two ways. Varieties with extra autumn growth (e.g. *Bronsyn*, *Arrow* perennial ryegrasses) can help build May covers. Varieties with extra early spring growth (e.g. *Arrow* perennial or *Tabu* Italian ryegrass) can feed stock better at lambing.