



Irish Grassland Association

SHEEP FARM WALK

Donegal

14th May 2024

6pm - 8.30pm

14th of May
@ 6:00 pm
- 8:30 pm
Eircode
F93KF77

Sponsored by



Farmer Profile

This year the IGA are travelling to the Stevenson farm in Southeast Donegal for the on-farm Sheep event. This Award-Winning Sheep and Cattle farm is run by mother and son team Margaret and Jack Stevenson is located midway between Castlefinn and Killygordon.

In 2023 the Stevensons won the Suckler to Weanling category in the National Livestock Show Sustainable Farmer Awards. The IGA are delighted to be hosting the sheep event on a superb sheep farm which is also an award-winning beef farm.

To say that the Stevenson farm ticks all the boxes in relation to best practice in sheep production hardly does justice to the level of flock management.

The Stevensons sheep enterprise comprises a Mid-Season flock lambing just over 500 Mature ewes and 60 Ewe lambs, the mature ewes consistently scan over 2 lambs per ewe with the most recent scan 2.04 lambs per ewe joined. Because of the high scan rate up to 17% of the ewes bear triplets, after cross fostering about 50 triplets are artificially reared on the farm. There is a mix of sheep breeds on the farm including Suffolk X Texel, Charolais, Roubex and Dutch Spotted. Mature Ewes and Ewe lambs are all mated to lamb at the same time, breeding female replacements are kept from within the flock.

The cattle enterprise comprises a herd of 29 spring calving Suckler cows with all progeny sold as weanlings. The suckler herd comprises a lot of first cross dairy beef cows with plenty of milk producing very impressive growth rates up to weaning with bulls gaining 1.47 kg/day and heifers 1.35 kgs/day. Similar to the sheep enterprise faecal sampling is used to determine whether cattle require anthelmintic dosing, cows are condition scored and a very good vaccination programme is in place for the Suckler herd.

Thanks to the great foresight of Margaret's late husband Nicholas the sheep handling facilities are first class with Sheep housed in a Slatted house with Plastic Sheep Slats, a roofed handling unit with washdown facilities, permanent individual pens for ewes after lambing, similarly the Cattle handling facilities are very good.

Lambs are marketed through a producer group, with the vast majority achieving U3 grades. Due to very careful selection of lambs for sale carcass weights are remarkably uniform. The average carcass weight for lambs sold in 2023 was 21.25 kgs with no meal fed prior to weaning, lambs are not castrated and only ram lambs fed meals after weaning.

Faecal sampling is used to determine if lambs require anthelmintic drench, mature ewes never receive a dose for worms, but receive a Fluke dose.

The foundation for achieving such high output of lamb is excellent management by Margaret and Jack concentrating on good animal nutrition based on excellent grassland management, they regularly make silage with a DMD of 75% from cutting in the third week of May. Attention is paid to soil health and fertility with regular whole farm soil analysis, use of Protected Urea and slurries are land spread using Low Emission system.

The Stevenson farm story is very impressive for both the sheep and cattle enterprises. Good grassland management is a key driver of the high output achieved, with paddock grazing central to this. Mixed grazing is practiced when possible.

Once again this is an evening event with light refreshments available from 6.00 pm and the event will finish at 8.30 pm. All farmers are welcome to come along to the event which promises something for all sheep farmers and indeed Suckler farmers.