Michael Conroy and Shane Moore.

New housing BETTER for man and sheep

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Shane Moore has recently taken over the running of the family farm from his parents, having been actively involved from a young age. He is growing a lowland sheep enterprise which is run alongside a small spring-calving suckler-to-weanling herd.

The farm is located near Athleague, Co Roscommon, and comprises mainly good free-draining soil as well as an area of marginal land usually only grazed by the cattle. The owned land (34ha) is split in two main blocks approximately 5km apart with an additional block of 4ha short-term rented land.

Farm plan

"When I joined the Teagasc Sheep BETTER Farm Programme in 2018, my key goal was to increase output from the sheep flock while controlling costs and ultimately increase profitability," says Shane.

To increase output per ewe, a high-genetic merit Belclare ram was purchased and mated with the best-performing ewes in the flock to produce replacements with good prolifacy.

The aim is to wean >1.70 lambs per ewe joined along while optimising the stocking rate of ewes on the farm within a primarily grass-based system.

Implementing key grassland management technologies on the farm such as improving soil fertility, use of temporary electric fencing and grass measuring have set the farm up for increasing ewe numbers. Sheep grassland systems work on the Teagasc Research Demonstration Farm has shown that each ewe and her lambs require one tonne of grass dry matter per year.

"Through weekly measuring of grass heights across the farm and recording them on PastureBase Ireland, the potential to carry more sheep on the farm became clear," says Shane.

However, one major stumbling block to increasing stocking rate of ewes on the farm was the limited sheep housing available. Additional sheep winter accommodation was needed to manage the increase in ewe numbers and allow Shane to move to one, compact, lambing period commencing in early March.

As a young trained farmer Shane decided after careful consideration, to apply for 60% TAMS funding to erect new sheep housing to accommodate 200 ewes. This year, 145 mature ewes and 35 ewe lambs were put to the ram with plans to build the flock to 200

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Shane Moore.

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mature ewes plus replacements in the coming years.

Planning additional sheep housing

"When I was mulling over the idea of building a new sheep shed the first question I asked myself was: Do I really need it?," says Shane.

"Up to last year, the ewes were split between an early and mid-season lambing flock mainly due to the limited sheep housing available on the farm. We had an old shed in the yard and I was lambing 35 ewes in early January and the remainder in March."

As the shed was not able to house all the ewes, some were lambed outdoors. This led to a prolonged lambing period and a lot of work. Shane combines an off farm job with his farming activities making a labour-efficient system all the more important to him.

"Because the farm is fragmented, it meant coming home from work and bringing round bales to ewes at night which often took over two hours, so there was much less family time."

With the clock ticking on his time to qualify as a young trained farmer, Shane needed to apply for a grant in 2020 in order to avail of the 60% rate, as he would soon have been farming for more than five years in his own right (which would disqualify him).

Building design

When Shane had decided to build, he visited a number of farms to look at sheep sheds. "I wanted a shed with slatted and straw-bedded areas," he says. "The shed would be used to house ewes in the winter. The slatted area would be used for collecting ewes and lambs in the summer for dosing and other routine tasks by incorporating a mobile sheep handling unit."

The penning can easily be removed on the bedded areas and these can be used as storage, if required, in summer. In consultation with Teagasc, Shane decided on a design which consisted of a 3.5m bedded pen on to a 4.1m feed passage; on the other side of the feed passage was a 2.7m slatted pen. Backing on to this slatted pen was another 2.7m slatted pen, 4.1m feed passage and 3.5m bedded pen. The design was in compliance with Dept of Agriculture S146 specifications. There is a 600mm walkway joining one side of the shed to the other.


Heavily pregnant ewes enjoy a strawed area.

The tanks are 1.2m deep with a 1.8m sump at either end of the shed for ease of agitation. Plastic slats have been installed. All the ewes are fed along the two feed passages that separate the straw-bedded areas from the plastic slatted pens.

Individual lambing pens can be set up in the feed passages and bedded pens as they become available.

Steps to TAMS application

"It took six weeks to get plans drawn up and planning permission submitted," says Shane. "It took another three months to get planning permission granted. I applied for the TAMS grant on 10 March 2020 and got approved on 9 September 2020."

Shane says he would like to thank the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine staff both at local and regional level for their help in sorting out a few minor problems with the application. Construction commenced on 21 September and all the concrete work was completed and the shed erected in early December.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and

Both sides of the shed are accessible via a walkway. The shed has slatted areas, as well as areas bedded with straw.

Brexit there was a delay in getting all the penning and barriers installed. Even with the best planning these were circumstances that couldn't be foreseen. Shane initially applied for a grant on a six-bay shed. He constructed a five-bay which will house 200 ewes and any additional ewes or replacements will be housed in the existing shed.

The five-bay shed was costing in excess of €80,000 so he was getting no grant on the additional bay. "I wanted to fund the cost of the build over five years so my preferred repayment option for him was the five-bay shed.

"You have to take into consideration the cost of the bridging finance in relation to the grant and VAT which can be reduced considerably by good planning, having the work completed quickly and all the paperwork correct when making your grant application."

As Shane has not got all the invoices yet, he expects the cost of the shed before VAT to be in the region of €95,000 and he will get a grant of approximately €48,000.

Shane's advice for anyone planning a building development is:

- Plan a year in advance to allow time to obtain planning permission and TAMS approval.
- Look at a number of sheds and talk to their owners when deciding on a design.
- Do your costings carefully and have a sound financial plan to fund the development.

Planning winter housing facilities for sheep

The provision of new sheep housing facilities is eligible for grant aid under TAMS II – 60% aid for the young trained farmer and 40% for all other applicants. The following are among the key considerations when designing new sheep housing:

- Sufficient feed space so that all ewes comfortably eat concentrates at one time being fed by one person without entering sheep pens (see Table 1).
- Adequate floor space depending on housing system – slatted or straw-bedded (see Table 2).
- Number of pen divisions so that ewes can be grouped by scanned litter size and expected lambing date, based on raddle colour.
- Ventilation that will help keep fresh air in the shed and remove many airborne pathogens and other harmful bacteria.
- Option of straw-bedded or slatted accommodation.
- Access to a suitable water supply in all pens.
- Easy access to individual lambing pens (ideally under same roof).
- Feed passages wide enough for machinery access and/or using for individual pens.
- Removable penning for ease of cleaning out and option to use building for other purposes during the rest of year.
- Suitable lighting and power sockets

Where all concentrate feeding is being done from the feed passage along front of pen, then relatively shallow pens of 2.5m to 3m will provide enough floor space. If pens are say 6m in width then walk through troughs will be needed to optimise number of ewes that can be accommodated in pens balancing floor space and feed space.

Table 1: Feeding space requirements

Type of ewe	Meal feeding mm	Roughage (hay rack)	Easy feed silage
Large (90kg)	600	200	200
Medium (70kg)	500	200	200
Small (50kg)	400	175	175

Source: DAFM S146 (2016)

Table 2: Floor space

Type of ewe	Slats m^2	Bedded m^2
Large (body weight 90kg)	1.2	1.4
Medium (body weight 70kg)	1.1	1.2
Small (body weight 50kg)	1.0	1.1

Source: DAFM S146 (2016)