

The Sheep Welfare Scheme – FAQ

What is it?

The Sheep Welfare Scheme was introduced to contribute to the continued development in animal and health welfare in the sheep sector and requires farmers to go beyond the relevant mandatory standards to enhance the standards of animal welfare in the Irish Sheep flock.

This scheme provides targeted support to those areas of animal welfare identified as making a meaningful positive contribution to sheep welfare, having regard to the systems of production in Ireland and the environment in which Irish sheep production is carried out.

Sheep farmers with breeding ewes can apply for payment based on 2 actions they choose from a menu to undertake.

What do I have to do to participate in the scheme, what work is involved?

Firstly you must have submitted a completed Annual Sheep Census return.

All existing participants are automatically enrolled into the following year of the scheme. New entrants can apply to join the Scheme by applying before the new year of the Scheme commences (ie 31 Jan each year).

New entrants who are eligible to participate will be sent an Application form, Terms and Conditions and Scheme Action record book. The application form must be returned to the Department with your chosen actions.

Thereafter you must undertake and complete the chosen actions, and comply with the relevant conditions set out in the terms and conditions.

Throughout the scheme you must maintain a Scheme Record Book to record these actions and you must retain all relevant receipts and supporting documents

In order to qualify for payment, you must retain the reference number of ewes in a given scheme year on which you must carry out the chosen actions. Failure to do so will result in penalty. Certain exemptions are in place – eg where on inspection a lower number of sheep is found due to a veterinary recommendation for a cull on welfare grounds.

Flock Types

The scheme actions are applicable to flocks of breeding ewes and are separated into **Lowland** and **Hill** flock actions

The original decision as to which category an applicant belongs was based on the type of stock (Lowland or Hill) held, or where there is a mix, the ratio stock type held and as reported in previous Annual Sheep Census returns.

- Applicants with greater than 50% lowland ewes must chose from the options for Lowland flocks
- Applicants with greater than 50% hill type ewes must chose from the options for Hill flocks.
- Applicants who deem that they have been incorrectly categorised should notify the Department promptly regarding their position.

I have mixed stock what Flock Type do I apply for?

You must choose whichever number is the greater. If you have greater than 50% lowland then you must chose from the options for Lowland flocks

If you have a greater than 50% Hill Flock then you must choose two options from the Hill Flock categories.

The actions chosen must be carried out on all the breeding ewes, irrespective of the lowland/hill categorisation

I have been identified in the incorrect flock type, what should I do?

There are two categories Lowland Flocks and Hill Flocks, the form which issued was based on the sheep census records held by the Department for preceding years. If this is incorrect please return the application form to the Department with the corrected data and a new form will issue.

What Actions are involved?

The scheme requires you to undertake and complete two measurable and verifiable Sheep Welfare actions. These actions are based on Flock Type – Lowland or Hill – which is designated using the sheep numbers returned on the Annual Sheep Census.

Applicants must choose **one action from Category A** and **one action from Category B** as appropriate to their Flock Type (Lowland or Hill) by ticking the appropriate boxes beside each option on the application form.

The various action Categories and choices are as follows -

Lowland Flock	Hill Flock
<u>Category A</u>	<u>Category A</u>
Lameness Control	Mineral Supplementation Ewes post mating
Mineral Supplementation Ewes post mating	Meal feeding lambs post weaning*
<u>Category B</u>	<u>Category B</u>
Parasite Control (Faecal Egg Count)	Parasite Control (Faecal Egg Count)
Scanning	Scanning
Flystrike control	Mineral Supplementation Lambs Pre weaning*

* Hill flocks may not choose both Mineral Supplementation of Lambs and Meal feeding of lambs post weaning.

Details in relation to the actions are set out in the terms and conditions of the scheme.

Can I change Actions?

The two actions chosen at this point must be adhered to by the applicant for the full duration of the scheme - which has been extended for 2021. Existing participants will be enrolled automatically into the new scheme year. It is therefore not possible to change actions once chosen.

How much is the payment? How long will I receive payment for?

Payment is €10 per eligible ewe and the scheme which was originally a 4 year scheme will be extended for Year 5. Payments are based on the completion of both chosen actions. Failure to complete one or both actions will result in reduced payments and penalties.

After each year the farmer will be asked whether he wishes to continue for another year in the scheme, or to withdraw (without clawback if all actions completed etc)

What is my number of eligible ewes?

With effect from Year 5 of the scheme, for existing participants in the scheme who were not classed as new entrants, the eligible number of breeding ewes is based on the higher of their average number of breeding ewes declared on the 2014 and 2015 Sheep Census returns or the number of breeding ewes declared on the 2017 Sheep Census return.

The eligible number of breeding ewes establishes a Reference Number for payment for the duration of the Scheme and which will not increase, except where required in line with GLAS obligations.

In the case of participants who joined the scheme as new entrants to sheep farming between Year 1 and Year 5 of the scheme, their reference number will be based on the higher of their existing reference number or the number of breeding ewes declared on the 2019 Sheep Census return.

For new entrants to sheep farming applying for Year 6 of the scheme, their reference number will be based on the number of eligible ewes returned on their most recent Sheep Census return. Where entry is between the Census process and the closing date of the scheme, the reference number will be calculated on a case by case basis.

However, if the number of breeding ewes returned on the 2020 or later Sheep Census, Inspection Report or Administrative Control Report, during the Scheme is lower than the Reference Number then the new lower number will become the Reference Number for payment.

It must be noted that where such circumstances occur and a higher number of breeding ewes is returned on the Census in a subsequent year then the reference number will increase accordingly but not beyond the original reference number.

How long will the scheme last?

Year 5 of the scheme will run from the 1st of February 2021 to the 31st of January 2022. Year 6 of the scheme will run from the 1st of February 2022 to the 31st of January 2023.

Is the Scheme subject to inspection?

As with all EU funded schemes, an inspection process will be in place including

- on site verification of animal numbers and inspection of record book and documents to confirm actions are carried out
- a percentage of farmers will also be requested to return their record books and documents to DAFM for examination to confirm compliance – cooperation with such requests is a condition of participation in the scheme.

Eligibility & calculating the reference number and payment rates

Q. The number of ewes entered on my sheep census for 2014 and 2015 was 100 ewes each year. I keep to this number to suit facilities but drop below it at certain times during the year. For example, I might have three or four ewes scanned dry which I sell plus I generally have 10 to 15 cull ewes for selling in June. Will this affect my payment and if so do I need to notify the Department?

A. Payment in the scheme is based upon keeping the reference number of animals for the full year. If you retain your own ewe lambs then these will satisfy to replace any shortfall in ewe numbers once they reach 12 months of age.

If you are in a system of purchasing your replacements in autumn breeding sales and have a shortfall in numbers during the year then you are obliged to replace (with a ewe or ewe hogget) any shortfall or notify the Department Sheep Welfare Scheme section of lower numbers. Your payment will be reduced to the lower number for that year's payment.

Q. Do ewe hoggets over 12 months of age need to be in-lamb to be used in the calculation?

A. No, dry ewe hoggets or pregnant ewe hoggets will suffice.

Q. If a farmer only had ewes in 2015 will that be taken as his reference number or will it be halved to take account of no ewes being farmed in 2014.

A. 2015 will be used as the reference number provided the farmer is a new entrant.

Q. I am a new entrant so have not received an application. Where can I get one?

A. You can request one by contacting The Sheep Welfare Scheme Section, DAFM, Government Offices, Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co Laois, by calling 057 8674422 or by emailing sheepscheme@agriculture.gov.ie.

Q. I am a new entrant to farming in 2020 and will only be purchasing ewes this spring. Do I apply for the scheme before the closing date on 31 January 2020 or will it be open to new entrants in 2021 again? I will not have a sheep census completed in 2019 as I had no sheep in 2019. Will this affect my application?

A. The Sheep Welfare Scheme will be open to new entrants for each scheme year, so yes you can join the scheme as a new entrant in 2021, the sheep census you return in 2020 will determine your Reference Number.

Q. My parents are in the process of getting the farm transferred over to me and we are hoping this will be done by the 2019 BPS closing date. Can participation in the scheme also be transferred to me?

A. Again, the Sheep Welfare Application form should be submitted but as there is no transfer policy set out all of these cases will be assessed by the Sheep Welfare section in Portlaoise on an individual basis.

Questions relating to measures

Q. When does the scheme commence or what is the year of operation? If I scanned in January 2020, will that satisfy the requirement for scanning for year 4?

A. The scheme year runs from 1 Feb to 31 January. Scanning before this in 2020 will not count in Year 5. In your instance, scanning in January 2021 will satisfy your requirement for year 5.

Q. Will this affect when I get my payment as I will not have all measures complete until next January.

A. There will be an advance payment in November followed by full payment once all measures are satisfied.

Q. I scan every year but it is not practical for my scanner to record the litter size of 300 ewes as he is scanning. I will have a receipt for the scan and I count the ewes and separate according to litter size after scanning. Will my count suffice?

A. Yes, your count will suffice. Write down the results in your Scheme Action Record Book.

Q. Do I need to feed concentrates to singles pre-lambing, I generally don't as I have good quality silage?

A. Sheep must be managed in a manner that is deemed best in reducing lamb mortality. If this is not feeding single ewes that are in good condition for fear of leading to a difficult lambing then that is fine. This should be noted in your Scheme Action Record Book.

Q. What is deemed post mating, the day after the ram is introduced to ewes or when the ram is removed from ewes?

A. For the purpose of the scheme post mating is deemed as when mating begins. This is as some farmers remove the ram after four weeks, others six while some leave him there until scanning.

Q. If you select mineral supplementation post mating and dose, how early do you need to give the first dose after mating? I don't like to interrupt ewes until at least 30 days after I let the ram in for fear that additional stress may impact on pregnancy rates.

A. The scheme does not want to interfere with normal farming practice that is working for you. Manufacturer's guidelines of products will be generally used to determine the suitability of the programme implemented. If treatment is recommended every four to six weeks for example then this will suffice. You must ensure that whatever supplement you use provides mineral supplementation for a period which includes at least 60 days post mating.

Q. I administer boluses to ewes that have claim year-long treatment pre-lambing. Will this suffice or do I need to administer any treatment after breeding?

A. If the manufacturer's guidelines state this claim and the product is licensed for use in Ireland then there will be no problem.

Q. Many hill farmers treat lambs with a bolus at five to six weeks of age when shearing. Boluses, (according to manufacturer's guidelines) have a lifetime of a few months – will this satisfy for the measure of pre-weaning mineral supplementation.

A. Yes, same as explained in the last answer.