**Mayo Blackface Group AGM 2015**

**Chairman : John Noonan,**

 **Teagasc Westport**

The mayo blackface group held their annual AGM in the Mill times hotel on Monday 26th January.

The group has grown in membership substantially over the last number of years with 226 paid up members on the books at present.

The group has two main activities for its members

1. Organise an annual breeding sale of top class breeding ewe lambs, hogget’s and ewes that is recognised nationally as a venue to buy mayo blackface sheep for crossing on lowland farms or for stocking uplands and hill farms throughout the country. I went through the prices both minimums , maximums and averages for 2014 and made comparisons with 2013 and 2012 prices with ewe lambs and aged ewes increasing in price while hoggets stayed mainly static. The sale is held the last Saturday in September annually and in 2014 was its biggest ever with over 1800 entries in the sale. The group works in cooperation with the Mayo Connemara Ram group who also have their annual sale on that day.
2. The group works closely with Kildare Chilling organising the pre booking of lambs and cast ewes for slaughter, issuing price and organising transport on a weekly basis throughout the year. A load of sheep leaves Westport on Wednesday morning at 6am, arriving at the factory before lunch. The group killed 10,600 sheep mainly lambs in 2014 and members were very well pleased overall with all aspects of the service, from pre booking to transport , killing out and the grading process at the factory.

The group works closely with the south mayo lamb producer group and the mayo mule and greyface group , all sharing an office in Ballinrobe and each benefiting through economies of scale. The group office is run efficiently by Breege Biggins and Breege Mc Donnell, providing an excellent service to over 450 farmers from Achill to Headford.

The group invited a number of local agri businesses that the groups work with closely, with each business asked to say a few words outlining what they doo , the products and services they offer.

They were , Iomlan a new company started up recently by Thomas Staunton and david Prendergast tourmakeady selling probiotic cleaning agents and other products to reduce mortality rates in chickens, lambs, pigs and cattle .

Aurivo co-op who supply a huge range of products including feedstuffs, feed buckets, fertilisers and a range of home and garden products.

Cormac tagging were in attendance and supply tagging for sheep and a wide range of creep feeders, sheep handling equipment and also the new genomic tags for sheep to name but a few products.

Greenan feeds displayed a range of coarse and concentrate feeds they have on offer to sheep farmers while Walsh Veterinary Newport rd Castlebar had a wide range of dosing products on display.

MSD Agvets Bosco Cowley gave a presentation on pneumonia in sheep, focusing specifically on pneumonia in young lambs and finishing lambs and the importance of having a correct vaccination programme that will limit the risk of deaths in the flock.

 The group will focus for the next 5 years on farm safety and invited Brian mchugh a health and safety inspector, who gave a presentation on farm accidents and what farmers should be doing to help reduce the chances of risk on their own farms. A large percentage of accidents happen to over sixty fives and young children, and farmers need to look at their farmyards through the eyes of a child or older person and correct any areas where simple accidents that lead to deaths on farms are occurring.

John Noonan gave a presentation of the young farmers scheme, the national reserve and the young farmers scheme as part of the national reserve. Farmers who started farming in 2010 onwards or who start farming in 2015 may be eligible for top ups worth up to 315 euro/ha if they fit the criteria and who have training completed or willing to complete training. The schemes are aimed at older farmers to encourage them to transfer or lease holdings with generous top up available if they do so.

There is a degree of work in changing herd and flock numbers and collecting relevant information for applications and needs to be completed well before closing dates.

For more information contact 0761064446 to see if it is advantageous in your situation.

The closing date for applications is 31st March2015.