

BEEF

January 2016

New for 2016

The Knowledge Transfer Groups Programme, which is the next phase of developing beef discussion groups that started under the Beef Technology Adoption Programme (BTAP), will kick off in earnest in early 2016. This beef discussion group forum will allow groups of like-minded farmers to meet on farms at different times of the year to discuss relevant topical issues. Farmers will receive €750 for participating in the programme, which will run for three years. In this new programme, farmers will have to complete a farm improvement plan (FIP) with their facilitator. This is a three-year farm plan, which will help the farmer to evaluate and plan ahead for his farm business. The FIP will consist of:

- annual profit monitor;
- herd health plan;
- focused breeding plan;



The Knowledge Transfer Groups Programme will allow farmers to meet on farms and discuss relevant topical issues.

- grassland plan; and,
- farm safety.

If you are currently in or have applied to join a beef discussion group under the new programme, the emphasis for January is to complete the profit monitor for 2015. The completed 2015 profit monitor will be mandatory for the first stage of the FIP in January 2016.

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The economics of finishing dairy bull calves at under 16 months of age

A report from Paul Crosson, Brian Murphy and Robert Prendiville

Current UK market specifications require that dairy bulls be slaughtered at less than 16 months of age and achieve a minimum carcass weight of 270kg. Therefore, a recent study carried out at the Teagasc Johnstown Castle Research Centre investigated the impact of breed type (Holstein Friesian (HF) and Jersey crossbred (JEX)) and finishing strategies (concentrates *ad libitum* (AL) or grass silage with 5kg dry matter (DM) of concentrate per head daily (SC)) on the economics of finishing dairy bull calves according to these market specifications. In addition to the animal performance data obtained in the study, actual and/or prevailing prices at the time of the study were used in an economic assessment.

Although carcass weight was greater for HF, the advantage was less in the SC finishing system, and no production system met the market-specified threshold. In general, livestock sales per head were greater for HF compared to JEX. However, calf purchase price was much less for JEX, reflecting the different market valuations of these calves. There was very little difference in feed intake between the two breed types and, consequently, total variable costs, and gross margin, were similar. With respect to finishing system, carcass price was greater for AL than SC and, in addition to higher carcass weights, led to much higher livestock sales for AL feeding. However, this advantage in favour of AL was more than offset by the higher feed costs and,

TABLE 1: Results from Johnstown Castle on impact of breed type and finishing strategies on finishing dairy bull calves.

	Friesian		Jersey crossbred	
	<i>Ad libitum</i>	Silage + 5kg	<i>Ad libitum</i>	Silage + 5kg
Financial (€/hd)				
[Beef carcass price (€/kg)]	3.85	3.76	3.82	3.76
[Carcass weight (kg/head)]	256	230	234	218
Livestock sales	988	866	894	818
Livestock purchases	137	137	63	63
[Finishing concentrates fed (t/head)]	1.8	1.2	1.7	1.2
Lifetime concentrate feeds	685	515	674	519
Milk replacer	55	55	55	55
Other feed (hay, silage)	65	82	60	74
Other variable costs (e.g., contractor, fertiliser)	155	149	149	144
Total variable costs	959	801	938	792
Gross margin	-109	-72	-107	-37

therefore, gross margin was greater for the SC finishing system.

The economic analysis in the present study showed that gross margins were negative for

both finishing strategies. Therefore, results from the current study indicate that alternatives to finishing spring-born dairy bull calves at under 16 months of age should be considered.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

The ICBF will have genomic proofs for farmers in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) in 2016. This new data will help all suckler farmers to make more informed breeding decisions, and will lead to increased levels of genetic gain in the national herd. Teagasc has been awarded the tender to complete the BDGP training course in

2016. The course will be four hours in duration and will be totally focused on all aspects of the BDGP – interpretation of breeding reports, breeding targets, compliance, etc. Farmers will receive €166 on completion of this training course so keep an eye out and get it completed when you see it advertised locally.

Be prepared for calving

In the next few months up to one million suckler calves will be born on Irish farms. This is the busiest time and preparation is key when labour is in short supply:

- you need one calving box for every 10 cows;
- a secure calving gate is essential;
- power wash and disinfect calving boxes;
- have your calving jack, ropes, bucket and gloves ready;
- do you have enough straw bedding on

farm?; and,

- set up your calving camera.

After a cow calves, leave her alone with the calf for half an hour to build up the maternal bond. If the calf is not suckling and is lethargic, put the cow back into the calving gate and get the calf to feed. Remember, no matter how well we think we know our cows, this is when cows are most protective and this is when accidents occur. Don't take any chances – a good calving gate is the key to a successful outcome.

Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme

The Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme is holding a calf rearing farm walk on the farm of Ben Sweeney, Enfield, Co. Kildare, on Wednesday, February 3, from 11.00am to 1.00pm. The major



focus of the walk will be on calf rearing, calf health and housing requirements. There will be speakers from Volac, MSD Animal Health, Drummonds Ltd and Teagasc, and anyone with an interest in calf rearing is welcome to attend.

Profit monitor 2015

January is the month that really should be used to gather financial information for 2015 and crunch the numbers using the profit monitor. Completing a profit monitor early in the year will give you the most benefit, and will signal areas that you need to focus on this year.

Table 2 outlines how the top one-third of suckler-to-weaning and suckler-to-beef farms

completing profit monitors performed in 2014. The information will serve as a good benchmark to compare your own farm results.

Setting a few targets for your farm will give you something to aim for in terms of cost reduction, increasing output, etc.



TABLE 2: Performance of top one-third suckler-to-weaning and suckler-to-beef farms completing profit monitors performed in 2014.

	2014 suckler-to-weaning top one-third	2014 suckler-to-beef top one-third
Stocking rate LU/ha	1.72	2.15
Liveweight kg/LU	334	360
Liveweight kg/ha	575	775
Gross output value/ha	€1,294	€1,831
Variable cost/ha	€573	€865
Gross margin/ha	€721	€966
Fixed costs/ha	€480	€652
Net margin/ha excl. premia	€241	€314

+ HEALTH & SAFETY

Seek support

A recent study by psychologists from NUI Galway and Teagasc clearly showed the value of social support. A farming or personal problem can escalate to anxiety and depression if left unresolved. However, by talking out the issue with family, a friend, an adviser or a healthcare



professional, depending on the nature of the issue, a solution can be found. The Samaritans offer a listening service, and can be contacted at: freephone 116123; SMS to 087-260 9090; email: info@samaritans.net.org; or, at local call-in centres.