Teagasc Advisory Newsletter

BEEF

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National reserve for young farmers

The national reserve for young trained farmers has opened again in 2017. This is put in place to support young farmers as they start off their careers in farming. The opening of the scheme has seen a lot of young farmers showing interest in renting land over a five- to six-year lease. While this is a positive development we must look at how this will be financed.

At a minimum, there must be a financial plan in place to pay for this expansion in the future. You must ask yourself some simple questions:

- how will I pay for this rented land?
- do I have to buy cattle to stock it?
- how will I pay for stock – savings/loan?
- what system will I put in place – suckler to beef, store to beef, dairy calf to beef?
- when will I have animals to sell in the future – cash flow from year to year?
- when I have the rented land paid for will I make a profit?

These are all relatively straightforward questions that you must be able to answer before you get into a long-term lease. Before you make any decisions, sit down with your adviser or a financial adviser to put a plan in place.

In this issue

Teagasc
Agriculture and Food Development Authority

Contract rearing

Cash flow is a major problem on all drystock farms and one possible solution may be contract rearing dairy heifers. This involves rearing the heifer for the dairy farmer at a daily cost of approximately €1.20/day. It can work in many different ways:

- taking in calves at 12 weeks old and returning them on the point of calving;
- taking in yearlings, breeding them and returning at point of calving; and,
- summer grazing and returning at housing.

For the beef farmer there is no initial capital expenditure on stock as the dairy farmer owns the animals. This allows the beef farmer to save money over a number of years for future investment on their own farm in areas such as stock, paddocks, buildings, etc.

Example: taking in 40 heifers at one year old. The beef farmer would put in heifers for AI daily for six weeks and then let in the bull supplied by the dairy farmer. Forty heifers at €1.20/day = €48/day = €1,440/month for seven months grazing = €10,080 (most payments are made monthly by direct debit).

We must take into account that there are costs to this system just like any other cattle system such as feed, fertiliser, vet bills, etc., and the figures stated above are not all profit. We know from profit monitors carried out on contract rearing farms that there are farmers achieving over €1,000/ha of a gross margin with this system. This is the time of year that dairy farmers are looking for a contract rearing service. More information is available on www.teagasc.ie.

Contract rearing dairy heifers offers a supplementary farm income.

Knowledge transfer groups deadline

The deadline for year one of knowledge transfer (KT) groups is May 31, 2017. To fulfil your requirements, you must have attended five group meetings or four group meetings and one national event. Your facilitator will be completing your farm improvement plan (FIP) which consists of:

- a profit monitor;
- a grassland management plan;
- a breeding plan;
- farm health and safety measures; and,
- animal health measures (completed by your vet).

Advisers/facilitators are very busy completing the FIPs and this coincides with the application for the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) closing on May 15. Please provide all required information as quickly as possible to your adviser/vet for them to complete the FIP.

The knowledge transfer groups deadline is fast approaching.

BETTER FARM UPDATE

One calving period or two?

Phase 3 participant Shane Gleeson will examine whether changing to one calving period over the year instead of two would streamline his workload.

Shane Gleeson is the Limerick representative for the new Teagasc/*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER Farm Challenge, which began in February of this year. Shane runs a 40ha suckler farm in Cappamore, Co. Limerick and his system is selling weanlings. Land type is very mixed on the farm with approximately 50% of the land dry and free draining, while the remaining 50% is of a very heavy, low-lying nature, with a high water table and poor productivity. Shane calves 40 sucklers over a split calving autumn and spring system. This is one of the main areas to be examined as part of the BETTER Farm Challenge. He works full-time off farm, his wife works also and they are rearing a family, so time is scarce. The programme team will examine if changing to a single calving season would help Shane streamline his workload. This presents its own challenges in terms of cash flow management if the system of selling weanlings is continued with all the sales coming at year's end. Shane has invested significantly in the farm over the years in terms of buildings, infrastructure and land purchase, so the farm has to cover a significant amount of repayments annually.

Soil fertility is another challenge Shane will have to address, with 70% of the farm index 1 for phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). Lime levels are largely adequate, with only minor application amounts needed. Since joining the programme Shane has paddocked out his land, extended a farm roadway and begun measuring grass weekly using PastureBase Ireland.

Shane Gleeson is taking part in the BETTER Farm Challenge. (Photo credit: Today's Farm.*)*

HEALTH & SAFETY

Safety at calving

Using a well-designed calving gate is crucial for farmer safety. After calving, the cow forms a strong protective bond with the newborn calf and becomes extremely protective. Restraining the cow in a calving gate cuts out the risk of being attacked when handling or treating the calf. There are many well-designed calving gates available and they qualify for Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme II (TAMS II) grant aid.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Maternal herd performance

Robert Prendiville, Simone McCabe and Noirin McHugh of Teagasc, Grange AGRIC and Moorepark AGRIC report that pregnancy rate is greater in high index suckler cows in the Teagasc maternal herd.

The maternal herd was assembled in 2012 with the purchase of maiden heifers (weanlings) from commercial farms throughout the country. Heifers were selected from two main sources reflective of replacement heifer options for Irish suckler herds: 1) beef cross-bred heifers bred from dairy cows; and, 2) beef cross-bred heifers sourced from suckler herds. Heifers were selected based on their sire's replacement index, with particular emphasis on breeding values for the key maternal profit indicator traits. Only heifers generated from high and low replacement index Angus and Limousin sires with high reliability (>70%) for the replacement index were selected.

Reproductive performance from three years is presented in **Table 1**. Tail paint and vasectomised 'teaser' bulls were used as aids for heat detection.

The breeding season lasted for 13 weeks. Cows were artificially inseminated for the first nine weeks of breeding and stock bulls were used thereafter. Mean calving date for the herd was March 20. Liveweight, body condition score (BCS) and reproductive performance were similar for high and low index dairy beef cross-bred cows. Similarly, no difference in liveweight or BCS was observed between high and low index suckler cows. However, pregnancy rate was 12% greater in high index suckler cows than in their low index counterparts.

Overall, reproductive efficiency of the herd was excellent and calving interval was less than the targeted 365 days.

Table 1: Replacement index, animal performance and reproductive efficiency of high and low replacement index dairy beef cross-bred and suckler cows.

	Dairy beef cross-bred		Suckler	
	High	Low	High	Low
Replacement index (€)	134 (5 star)	78 (4 star)	101 (5 star)	36 (2 star)
Liveweight at breeding	562	569	634	622
BCS at breeding	2.64	2.66	2.87	2.89
Mean calving date	March 17	March 19	March 22	March 23
Calving to service interval (d)	63	60	62	64
Calving to conception interval (d)	78	76	79	77
Pregnancy rate to first service (%)	49	53	55	59
Pregnancy rate (%)	90	93	95	83
Number of services per cow (n)	1.73	1.63	1.76	1.56
Calving interval (d)	363	361	362	359