

BEEF

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Two-year old calving

Edited by
Vivian Silke,
Cattle Specialist

If you want to calve spring-born continental beef heifers at two years of age then a few critical targets must be met. At this stage, your strongest yearling heifers should be at least 375kg awaiting turnout. If you aren't sure of the weight, then borrow a scales and identify your heaviest heifers. These animals should grow at 1kg/day from turnout (April 1) to mid May. Hopefully they will average at least 420kg at that stage and will be cycling. Use a proven easy-calving stock bull to breed them if available, or use a high reliability (>80%) AI bull with less than 5% for calving difficulty. This is the most critical decision you will make to increase the chances of these heifers producing



Limousin heifer by AI bull CWI calved at 24 months with Limousin bull calf by AI sire PCH.

a live calf next spring and lasting in the herd for many years to come. The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) has proven that it costs approximately €600 per heifer to keep them an extra year to calve at three-years old and also that these animals have poorer subsequent fertility. So if they are heavy enough (minimum 420kg at 15 months of age) then they are old enough to breed.

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BPS and National Reserve for young farmers

Both the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and the National Reserve for young farmers are currently open for applications. The only way to apply for either scheme this year is online and you should remind your neighbouring farmers that may have posted their applications for BPS in the past that this option is no longer available. They must register online with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) e-services website as a farmer themselves or through the services of an agricultural adviser.

The National Reserve for young trained farmers should be applied for by young farmers to support their careers in farming. Successful applicants to the

National Reserve receive an allocation of entitlements at the national average value, or a top-up to the national average value on entitlements that are below the national average. It is expected that the fund for 2018 will be in the region of €3.5m.

The scheme is open to any young farmer who is aged no more than 40 years during the calendar year in which they first submit an application under the BPS.

They must also activate BPS entitlements for 2018. The opening of the scheme in the last few years has seen a lot of young farmers showing interest in renting land over a five- to six-year lease period.

BDGP female targets

Animal breeding is often described as a 10-year process, but any farmer that is breeding their own replacements and is a participant in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) scheme must focus on October 31, 2020. On that date each applicant must have at least 50% females that are rated four to five star, genotyped and at least 16-months old when compared with their reference number. With many breed societies running bull sales all over the country during the spring, now is the time to pick out a genotyped bull with a sufficiently high star rating for replacement index value (at least €130). Pick out your own cows with good replacement indexes to mate with this bull, and possibly breed the remainder of the cows with

a terminal sire to add value to these progeny that aren't required as replacements. Incidentally, any participant of the BDGP scheme that uses a bull must have at least one four- to five-star genotyped bull for either the terminal or replacement index on the farm by June 30, 2019. You can now kill two birds with the one stone by purchasing the correct bull in the next few months. In small herds, two bulls may not be a viable economic option, so consider using some level of AI from high reliability (at least 80%) replacement sires on your best breeding cows. You have more choice with AI usage as regards the level of replacement value that you can aim for. Many AI companies have plenty of bulls with replacement indexes of at least €140.

April BETTER Farm open days

Teagasc/*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER Farm Beef Challenge open days take place on April 5 on the farm of Gareth McCormack near Bailieboro in Co. Cavan at 3.00pm and on April 10 on the farm of

Glen McDermott in Castlebaldwin, Co. Sligo at 4.00pm. The main focus of the walks will be split into two parts. The first will focus on closing up for silage, demonstrating fertiliser requirements for

silage and examining the results the BETTER farmers achieved in 2017. The second focus of the walks will be breeding. Both farmers use almost 100% AI and have a definite breeding plan in terms of sire selection and the type of animal they want to

breed. The walk will demonstrate how to best use AI on suckler herds, using heat detection and sire selection. There will be speakers from Teagasc and the *Irish Farmers Journal* present on the day. Both events will be knowledge transfer (KT) approved.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Tough conditions

Shane Gleeson of Cappamore, Co. Limerick is facing fodder issues following poor growth response and the recent bad weather.

Shane spread urea at a rate of 23 units per acre on 50% of his drier ground in mid-February. So far, the response has been poor with growth rates typically coming in between 3kg and 5kg DM/day. Average farm cover has been around 625kg DM/ha for mid March, with roughly 20% of drier land grazed. Lower covers were grazed first but wet weather and snow has meant stock had to be taken off land a number of times in the last month. Silage reserves are running low on the farm, with about three weeks' supply left. An outbreak of cryptosporidium occurred mid-calving season and

Shane has tackled the issue by treating with Halocur and turning cows and calves to grass as they calve. He will attempt to curtail further infection next year by power washing the sheds mid-summer and disinfecting thoroughly. Shane will apply a further 35-40 units of nitrogen (N) per acre in late March to try and stimulate growth. Approximately 20% of ground received 2,500 gallons of slurry in February. This land is low in phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) and will be targeted with 18-6-12 for the rest of the year to try and improve soil fertility.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Reduce machinery deaths

In April, farming is mainly outdoors with a lot of tractor and machinery movement. Being struck or crushed by machinery continues to cause over 50% of farm deaths. A vehicle moving at fast-walking speed of 8km/h (5mph) travels two metres per second. This puts bystanders at high risk due to the weight and power of a vehicle or machine. Drive slowly in farmyards to reduce risk. Fatal accidents happen also due to operating from incorrect positions and inadequate parking.



Demonstration of a blind zone for a child.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Blueprints for dairy steer production

Robert Prendiville of Teagasc Research Centre, Grange, Co. Meath reports on raising dairy-bred steers.

Given the current dairy calf trade this spring, some beef producers are considering purchasing dairy-bred calves. Although the profitability of dairy-calf-to-beef production is dependent upon calf purchase price, concentrate costs and beef price, other measures such as starting with a healthy calf, pasture management and monitoring animal performance throughout the production cycle also have a significant bearing on farm profit and can be controlled inside the farm gate.

Below are blueprints and targets of production for steers generated from dairy herds. All breed types can be considered if their carcasses are commercially acceptable.

21-month steer system

For spring-born calves, winter finishing can be avoided by slaughtering cattle at a lighter carcass weight at the end of the second grazing season. Calves are castrated towards the end of the first grazing season and are 'stored' through the first winter on good-quality grass silage and concentrates before turnout. Steers are finished at the end of the second grazing season having been supplemented with concentrates for the final 60 days. Holstein-Friesian steers in this system require 5kg of concentrate daily for 60 days pre-slaughter, while Angus and Hereford dairy crossbred steers require 2.5kg of concentrates daily for the final 60 days. Target carcass weight is 280kg.



Friesian steers at grass approaching slaughter date.

24-month steer system

Management of steers in this system is identical to that of the 21-month steer. However, in this system steers are housed in November for finishing, which occurs during the second winter and cattle are offered good-quality grass silage with 5kg concentrates. The target carcass weight is 320kg. Early-maturing steers finished indoors are typically slaughtered at 23 months of age (300kg carcass weight), as carcass fat cover would be acceptable.

28-month steer system

Management of steers in this system is identical to those described above. However, in this system, steers are housed for the second winter on a grass silage-only diet. They are then returned to pasture in March for the third grazing season and slaughtered in late May/early June. The target carcass weight in this system is 350kg and 320kg for Holstein Friesians and early maturing steers, respectively.