

BEEF

March 2018

BDGP eligibility report

The Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF) is now posting all Beef Data Genomics Programme (BDGP) herd owners their BDGP eligibility report. This is a new report, the first of its kind, and should be examined closely by all suckler farmers who are in the Programme.

Some of the key requirements for BDGP are that at least 20% of your reference cow numbers are eligible females (at least four stars on the replacement index), that you have at least one eligible stock bull (if you are using stock bulls) and that 80% of the AI used on the farm is from eligible bulls.

This report tells you exactly where your herd stands in relation to all of these requirements.

If you find that some of these are not going to be met on your farm, you still have time to achieve them but you need to look at taking action sooner rather than later.

This is especially true if you are currently not meeting the 20% female target for October 31, 2018.

Look at all of the options and if necessary contact your Teagasc adviser who can discuss the options that are best suited to you.

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Time to get some cattle out to grass

Every day a beef animal spends at grass will save about €1.50-€2/day per animal. The simple principle is that this animal feeds itself on the cheapest possible feed and spreads its own slurry when grazing. Liveweight gain is also improved. So this is a win-win for the beef farmer. The place to start in turning out cattle to grass is with lighter/store animals. Choice of paddock/field is

important. This paddock should be easily to get to, dry, sheltered and ideally square in shape. It should not be the strongest grass on the farm either. It takes a while for animals to get going/warm up to the task of grazing.

Turning animals out also stimulates the farm to grow grass. It also sets the farm up to produce higher-quality grass during April and May.

Stockbull Finder

The ICBF has launched a new feature on its website called the Stockbull Finder that is extremely useful for farmers who are looking to purchase a pedigree beef stock bull this spring. Pedigree breeders that are participating in the Whole Herd Performance Recording Programme have agreed to have their stock independently weighed and scored by the ICBF. In return the ICBF advertises all of their young bulls for sale on its website. To access the Stockbull Finder simply go to www.icbf.com and click on the Stockbull Finder logo on the front page. After that, you can choose your selection criteria, which include the counties you want to look in, the breed

of bull you want to purchase and the minimum star rating you



want the bull to have. The programme will very quickly show you which bulls match your criteria, the name of the breeder that owns them and the contact details for that breeder. This facility allows buyers to quickly see where there are bulls that match their requirements. It also means they will be buying a bull from a herd that has been independently assessed, which increases the reliability of the €urostar indices on those bulls, giving you more confidence in the figures.

Upcoming beef events

Calf to beef

The Teagasc Green Acres Calf to Beef Programme is holding a walk on the farm of Pat Bowden in Lisdowney, Co. Kilkenny on Wednesday March 21 at 11.00am. Pat is one of the participating farmers and he rears both autumn- and spring-born Friesian steers. Topics that will be covered on the day will include calf rearing, spring grassland management and the financial returns achievable in calf-to-beef systems. This is a Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) approved knowledge transfer (KT) beef event and all are welcome to attend.

BETTER Farm events

The Teagasc/*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER Farm beef programme is presenting two events in April. The first is on Thursday April 5 on Gareth McCormack's farm in Bailieborough, Co. Cavan and the second is on Tuesday April 10 on Glen McDermott's farm in Castlebaldwin, Co. Sligo. Both these suckler farms produce weanlings for sale and started in the programme in 2017. These events will focus on improving both grassland management and breeding to increase profitability. All are welcome to attend.



BETTER FARM UPDATE

Lime the catalyst

Glen McDermott, the Teagasc/*Irish Farmers Journal* BETTER Farm beef challenge representative for Sligo, is tackling the poor soil fertility on his farm in Castlebaldwin.



All of the BETTER Farm challenge participants face different obstacles as they try to increase the profitability of their farms and ultimately try to surpass the €1,250/ha gross margin target set by the programme. Glen's biggest challenge is to grow and utilise more grass. Every extra tonne of grass utilised on a drystock farm increases net profit by €105.

At the beginning of the programme, all farms were soil sampled and the soil fertility on Glen's farm was on the floor. Soil pH varied from 5.7 to a worrying 4.8, and even when walking across paddocks the level of moss in the sward was very high. All fields were given two tonnes of lime per acre. Grazing ground was covered in the early spring and silage ground was covered after the first-cut silage in June. The farm is predominantly Index 2 for both phosphorous (P) and potassium (K).

One year on and while Glen's profit monitor hasn't improved significantly (as he is building stock numbers), the soil fertility on the holding most certainly has (**Table 1**). The sward is much cleaner and even healthier to look at. His opening farm cover came in at 1,040kg DM per hectare – a healthy bank of grass to have coming into the grazing season. When pH alone is corrected from a low baseline on any grassland, regardless of P and K status, grass production should increase by around 10% without any additional fertilisers or differing management.

Research carried out at Teagasc Johnstown Castle has shown for every tonne of lime spread per acre, an increase of 0.3 can be expected on the pH scale, depending on soil type. Glen is holding a BETTER Farm beef event focusing on breeding and silage on Tuesday, April 10.

Table 1: The soil fertility of four paddocks on the farm sampled in 2017 vs 2018.

Paddock	pH 2017	pH 2018	P (ppm) 2017	P (ppm) 2018	K (ppm) 2017	K (ppm) 2018
1	5.7	6.0	3.1	3.50	103	117
2	5.7	6.5	4.3	5.6	107	113
3	5.0	6.0	1.6	3.3	94	112
4	5.3	5.7	1.9	1.9	86	89



RESEARCH UPDATE

Value of citrus pulp

Mark McGee, Michael Kelly and Aidan Moloney of AGRIC, Teagasc, Grange compared citrus pulp to rolled barley when finishing cattle on grass silage.

The effects of replacing rolled barley with citrus pulp in a supplement on intake, growth and carcass traits of late-maturing suckler-bred steers (initial liveweight, 446kg) over a 135-day finishing period were examined. Animals were housed in pens in a slatted floor shed and offered grass silage (DMD 71%) *ad libitum*, plus 4.0kg dry matter (in two feeds) daily, and one of three concentrate supplements. The 'control' concentrate, based on rolled barley, comprised 86.5% rolled barley, 6% soya bean meal, 5% molasses, and 2.5% minerals and vitamins (BAR). In the other two concentrates, barley was replaced with 40% citrus pulp plus 1% soya bean meal (CIT40), or 80% citrus pulp plus 2% soya bean meal (CIT80). Concentrates were

prepared as coarse mixtures and formulated to have similar concentrations of protein (PDIE) per kg dry matter. The results showed that supplement type did not affect grass silage intake.

Daily liveweight gain and feed conversion ratio did not differ between BAR and CIT40, but animals offered CIT80 had a lower liveweight gain and poorer feed efficiency. Carcass weight, kill-out proportion, carcass conformation and fat score did not differ significantly between treatments. In conclusion, under the conditions of this study, citrus pulp can replace rolled barley at inclusion rates up to 40% when offered as a supplement to grass silage without negatively affecting performance.



HEALTH & SAFETY

Accidents cost time and much more

A just completed Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS) farm accident add-on survey has revealed that farm accidents have risen by 13% in the last five years. Accidents involved livestock (in 42% of cases), vehicles/machinery (25%), trips and falls (19%), and chainsaws/timber (7%). By farm enterprise, the highest level of accidents in the last five years was in dairying (18%), followed by tillage (12%), sheep (11%) and cattle enterprises (8%). Almost all farm accidents (97%) required medical treatment and 83% led to loss of work



Be careful around cows at calving time. time, with 30% leading to 30 days or more lost. March is one of the busiest work times on farms, keep safety to the fore.