



# BEEF

September 2022

## Jobs to consider this month

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With a bit of luck, you will have secured enough fodder to see you through the winter months, but it is timely to do a fodder budget and test silage quality.

Weanlings that will be housed next month will need their booster pneumonia vaccination if they have already been vaccinated. For those not already vaccinated, if they need to get a two-shot programme times need to be right to give them the best cover. Consult with your vet to determine the best programme for your farm.

With the dry weather last month, signs of lungworm in young stock may be delayed. Be alert to signs like coughing in both suckler and dairy-beef weanlings. If you suspect lungworm,

dose to ensure they don't carry heavy burdens into the shed.

Most spring-born calves will now be in that five-to eight-month window, which is ideal for recording weights if you are in the Beef Environmental Efficiency Programme – Sucklers (BEEP-S). Consider weighing the cow and calf and record the weights with the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation (ICBF). If you have opted for the meal feeding option, the calves will need to get meal four weeks prior to weaning and for two weeks post weaning.

If you have selected the faecal sampling option to check cows for fluke, you have until October 3 to get the samples into an approved lab.

## Look at the figures

On the economic side it has been a turbulent few months but thankfully factory, store and weanling prices have held up well and the hope is that will continue. Looking at the *Irish Farmers Journal* Martwatch figures, weanling and store prices are up on average 7% on last year and 27% on prices from 2019.

On the input side, fears about meal price hikes seem to have reduced slightly but prices are still north of €400/t and remain volatile. Silage costs are now nearer €50/t compared to just €30/t this time last year. The effect of this based on our budgets is that the variable costs to finish a bullock over the winter is now close to €550/head

compared to €390 last year. The variable cost of carrying a dairy-beef calf through a 120-day winter will be €190/head compared to €125 in 2021.

With such volatility and increased financial outlay, taking time to crunch the numbers could be time well spent. For some it will be a partial budget to determine whether to take the current store price or keep and finish. For weanling producers, the question will be do you hold all the weanlings or cash some in now? For finishers, you are trying to weigh-up store and feed prices with what factory price will be available later in the year or next spring.

## RESEARCH UPDATE



### The maternal herd at Grange

COLIN BYRNE, Animal and Bioscience Research Department, Teagasc Grange, Dunsany, Co. Meath reports on work to measure the value of the Euro-Star replacement index.

The Euro-Star replacement index is a useful tool for determining the potential of a cow's daughters as suckler cows and the potential beef performance of the progeny from those daughters. The maternal herd at Grange was set-up to validate the Euro-Star replacement index by comparing the production performance (milk yield, liveweight, and weaning), reproductive efficiency, and feed/production efficiency of elite and average suckler cows for maternal traits.

The herd currently consists of 90 cows

representing high replacement first-cross dairy, high replacement suckler bred, and average replacement index suckler sourced, with Limousin or Angus as the cow sire. Cows are inseminated to a Charolais bull and heifers inseminated to a Hereford bull with 100% calving at 24 months of age. Liveweight was recorded monthly on both calves and cows. Weaning efficiency was calculated by adjusting the nearest cow and calf weight to 200-day weight (based on age of calf). Cows and calves were rotationally grazed on a paddock system following turnout in March. Milk yield was determined in late lactation on all cows. Preliminary analysis shown in **Table 1** highlights that there was an €86 difference in the high index compared to the average index suckler

cows used. First-cross dairy were similar to the high index suckler-bred cows and €92 higher for replacement index on average. High index suckler-bred cows were 13kg lighter than average index cows, while first-cross dairy cows were 53kg and 66kg lighter than high and average index suckler-bred cows, respectively. Calving interval was similar across all groups of cows. The trend in pre-weaning and weaning performance was similar across pre-weaning average daily gain (ADG), cow milk yield and weaning weight, where first-cross dairy cows performed best with high index suckler-bred cows intermediate, and

average index suckler cows performing poorest. This trend was also evident in weaning efficiency, with first-cross dairy cows weaning 7% and 11% more of their liveweight than high and average suckler-bred cows, respectively. The heifer progeny of these cows currently weigh 489kg and will be slaughtered at 20 months of age. The steer progeny currently weigh 526kg and will be slaughtered between 22 and 24 months of age. Data collected from the maternal herd cows at Grange indicates that the Euro-Star replacement index is indeed a useful tool to consider when selecting replacement heifers.

**Table 1: 2021 performance of suckler cows of differing source and genetic merit in a spring-calving grass-based system.**

Cow source Genetic merit	Beef X dairy	Beef	
	High	High	Average
Replacement index (€)	162	156	70
Liveweight (kg)	608	661	674
Calving interval (days)	364	366	366
Calf weaning weight (kg)	308	282	271
Calf pre-weaning ADG (kg/day)	1.26	1.14	1.08
Milk yield (late lactation, kg/day)	7.5	6.7	4.9
Weaning efficiency (%)	51	43	40

## HEALTH & SAFETY

### Maintaining wellbeing

Wellbeing is vital for ongoing satisfaction with life, yet rural dwellers report lower levels of wellbeing than the population as a whole. Mental Health Ireland (MHI) advocates the following five-step approach that anyone can follow to feel good and function well: connect with the people around you; be active, take exercise; take notice, be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling; keep learning, do something new; and,

give, volunteer or join a community group. Further information can be gained at the MHI website: <https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/>. A research group at Dublin City University (DCU) has asked Teagasc to promote a survey on farmer mental health literacy and help seeking among farmers. More information is available on Twitter at @FarMHealthP. You can complete the survey at: [bit.ly/3AKMKbl](https://bit.ly/3AKMKbl).



## DairyBeef 500 farm walk


Farming 47ha of grassland just outside Ballymacarbray, Co. Waterford, Richard Long operates a calf-to-beef system. He purchases 100 calves annually and carries them to beef between 20 and 24 months. Richard has been sourcing calves off his brothers Mike and Liam, who operate a dairy farming business. This arrangement has allowed for the introduction of more high-merit continental genetics into the dairy herd's breeding programme; the 2022 calf team consists of a mixture of Angus, Hereford, Aubrac, Charolais and Belgian Blue genetics. Since 2019, a number of technical efficiencies

have been improved upon, leaving the 2020-born animals at carcass weights of 316kg for steers at 23 months and 281kg at 22 months for heifers – an average reduction in slaughter age of 2.5 months and a 30kg heavier carcass.

Richard will host the first major farm walk of the DairyBeef 500 campaign on September 8 at 3.00pm, where details of how this reduction in slaughter age was achieved through improvements in animal performance and genetics.

The farm will be signposted from Ballymacarbray and the Eircode is E91 VH67.

### Climate Actions for September



Spread lime on low pH soils this month

Spread potassium on low K index soils

Implement a dosing and vaccination programme for young stock

Continue to focus on the Autumn grazing targets

Weigh replacement heifers now and take remedial action to address below target weights