

Newford Suckler Open Day

Meeting the Challenges

Athenry, Co. Galway. Tuesday, May 23rd, 2023



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Welcome to Newford Farm open day 2023

On behalf of all the stakeholders involved in Newford Farm, including Dawn Meats, Teagasc, Irish Farmers Journal and McDonalds, we would like to welcome you to today's farm walk. The focus of today's event will be on all the changes and lessons learned since the project was initially set up in 2015. The 100-cow suckler calf-to-beef demonstration farm has highlighted many positive features of the production system, with the herd excelling in breeding and calving performance with dramatic reductions in the ages that animals are slaughtered. The herd operates using 100% AI.

In recent years, there has been a TB outbreak in the herd resulting in a cull. The herd now consists of 85 suckler cows on 58 ha (reduction in land area of 10 ha and one land block) across three blocks of land.

Changes to the finishing blueprint has resulted in heifers being finished at just under 18 months of age and steers being finished under 21 months. Increases in variable costs experienced by all farmers have also hampered the farm's financial performance. In 2022, Newford farm joined the Future Beef programme, being one of 22 suckler beef farms located across the country. Over the coming years Newford farm will aim to demonstrate best practice by adopting a number of technologies to become more sustainable though its involvement in the Signpost programme. I hope that you will take something from today's visit and partake in the discussion in order that we all learn from each other.

Dan Browne,
Chairman of the Newford Stakeholders



Newford suckler overview

Since the project started in 2015, Newford land area has seen slight changes due to development of Athenry town, while TB issues in 2022 reduced cow numbers. A decision was taken to reduce land base and land block numbers and as result the lease of 13 ha of grassland and a farmyard located 12 km from the Newford farm yard, was not renewed.

Cow numbers have been reduced as well as stocking rate reducing from 2.65 to 2.41 livestock units per hectare for the years ahead. Over the last eight years, 100 animals have typically calved down each spring. Cow type is angus and hereford first cross cows bred from the dairy herd. This hasn't changed since 2015, this cow type works well and is delivering offspring which are easily finished at an early age without the need for excessive concentrate input.

Over the past eight years, heifers born on the farm were finished from 18-20 months of age and males were finished as steers from 20-22 months. By extending the grazing season, the 2021 born beef heifers were slaughtered under 18 months of age, which lead to a significant saving in concentrate and silage requirements.

One of the biggest changes to come about during the project, has been the move to 100% artificial insemination. This change has allowed better use of genetics, through matching good terminal beef sires with suitable cows to improve the beef characteristics of progeny while still retaining calving ease. For example, Newfords 2021 born heifers were slaughtered under 18 months of age, with minimal lifetime concentrate input, with a carcass weight of 296 kg and grading R- 3=. Steer carcass performance has been fairly consistent over the years, while age at slaughter has been reduced to 20 months, producing 355 kg R= 3- grading carcasses in 2020, which is on average eight months earlier than steers slaughtered at a national level.

Grassland management has been a major focus in terms of production efficiency with 14 t dry matter per ha achieved in 2022. The farm has 38 paddocks across the three land blocks and all of these can be subdivided using pigtails and a geared reel. Animals graze covers of 1200-1500 kg dry matter per hectare. Paddocks with covers greater than 1500 kgs DM/ha are removed as surplus bales producing silage testing at greater than 75% dry matter digestibility. These high quality bales are fed back to finishing steers and weanlings during the winter and this also helps reduce the need to feed expensive concentrates over the winter.

Finishing performance

Irish agriculture is obliged to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 25% by 2030, as set out in the Climate Action Plan. One of the many strategies being targeted to achieve this is the reduction in the age of slaughter of animals on beef farms by three months, moving from an average of 27 months back to 24 months. This three month reduction in slaughter age will generate a reduction in the quantity of emissions from the national beef herd, delivering up to 0.7 million tonnes of GHG emissions reductions. The primary way in which this can be achieved is by ensuring animal performance levels are optimised from grazed pasture and high quality silage at farm level, something which Newford farm has been working on since 2015. The improvements in animal performance witnessed at farm level have led to a reduced age of slaughter whilst still meeting market specifications.

In 2021 there were 40 heifer calves born on the farm. They were at grass until the 7th Dec 2021 at an average weight of 379 kg at housing. They were fed 2 kg/head per day over the 44 day winter period and ad lib silage (75% DMD). In total, these animals were fed just 256kg of meal at a cost of €88 in their lifetime. They were turned out to grass on the 20th January 2022. The first group of 20 heifers were drafted for slaughter on the 4th August 2022 with a further 10 finished on 31st August 2022. The remaining heifers were finished by 11th November 2022. Last year, the steers were finished at 21 months on average with a carcass weight of 355kgs at 21 months. As can be seen in Table 1, in 2022 there were 26 cows culled on the farm. This was much higher than normal as eight of these cows tested positive for tuberculosis and were removed from the farm in July. Hence, this has resulted in a reduced carcass weight overall and an artificially high number in 2022.

Table 1. 2022 farm slaughter performance

| | Steers | Heifers | Cull cows |
|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Number | 42 | 40 | 26 |
| Average slaughter date | 27/10/2022 | 18/08/2022 | 07/08/2022 |
| Average months | 21 | 18 | 75 |
| Carcass weight | 355 | 296 | 319 |
| Average grade | R=3- | R- 3= | 0=4- |
| Average kill out | 53% | 52% | 48% |
| Average price/kg | €5.03 | €5.06 | €4.39 |
| Total value | €1,786 | €1,507 | €1556 |

The average carcase weight of the 2021 born heifers was 296 kg at an average age of under 18 months of age as evident in Table 2. Similar carcass weights were achieved in heifers finished on the farm at the start of the project but they were finished three months later at 21 month of age and with 264 kg/head of additional concentrates being fed. The 2017 born heifers were sold live off the farm due to drought conditions in 2018.

Table 2. Heifer slaughter performance

| Year of birth | 2015 | 2016 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|
| Grade | R + 4- | R = 4- | R = 3= | R = 3= | R = 3- | R – 3= |
| Carcass weight (kg) | 296 | 291 | 299 | 299 | 311 | 296 |
| Live weight (kg) | 574 | 560 | 569 | 570 | 583 | 564 |
| Kill out % | 52 % | 52 % | 53 % | 52 % | 53 % | 52 % |
| Age (months) | 20 | 19 | 20 | 20 | 20 | Under 18 |
| Value (€) | €1,176 | €1,167 | €1,117 | €1,188 | €1,396 | € 1,507 |
| Price/Kg | €3.97 | €4.01 | €3.74 | €3.97 | €4.49 | €5.06 |

Last year the steers were finished just before Christmas at under 21 months on average carcass weight of 355kg as shown in Table 3. This is an 18 kg increase in carcass over the project and a decrease in concentrates of 83kg/head.

Table 3. Steer slaughter performance

| Year of birth | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Grade | R = 3= | R - 3+ | R = 3+ | R + 3= | R = 3- | R = 3- | R = 3- |
| Carcass weight (kg) | 337 | 341 | 367 | 350 | 350 | 357 | 355 |
| Live weight (kg) | 652 | 653 | 685 | 642 | 647 | 663 | 670 |
| Kill out % | 52 % | 52 % | 54 % | 55 % | 54% | 54 % | 53 % |
| Age (months) | 19 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 20 | 21 | 21 |
| Value (€) | €1,305 | €1,400 | €1,434 | €1,315 | €1,389 | €1,611 | €1,786 |
| Price/Kg | €3.87 | €4.10 | €3.90 | €3.76 | €3.96 | €4.51 | €5.03 |

The improvements achieved are arising from improvements in genetics through improved terminal beef sires used on a more mature cow herd and improved animal performance from better grassland management as well as increased grazing season length, resulting in better nutrition and animal health.

Calf performance

Excellent growth rates are being achieved with the calves in the herd. This can be attributed to:

- Suckler cows that calve compactly at the start of the grass growing season and have high milk yields.
- Good herd health and stock management throughout all stages of the year.
- Selecting AI sires with good terminal traits leading to heavier weaning weights.
- Selecting replacements with good maternal traits, with an emphasis on good milk yield to drive weaning weight.
- Excellent grassland management to ensure that cows are producing milk so that calves meet their full growth potential.

The average 200 day weight of the weanlings on the farm is outlined in Figure 1. In 2022 the bulls 200 day weight was 318kg with an average daily gain of 1.36kg/head/day while the heifers weighed 308kg and gained 1.33kg/head/day. Since 2016 the average 200 day weight figure has increased by 19kg from 296kg to 315 kg on the farm.

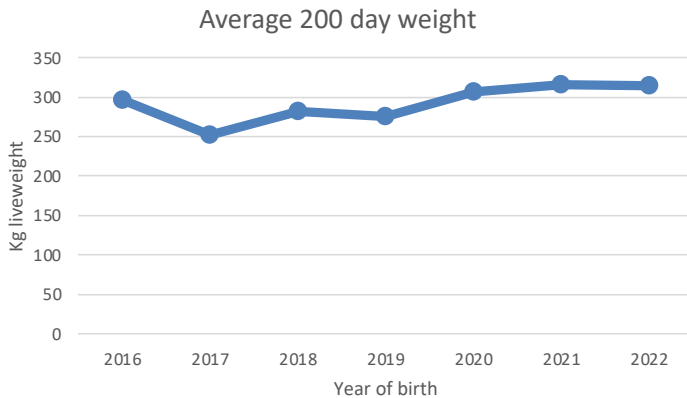


Figure 1. Average 200 day weight (Kg)

Financial performance

The 2022 Teagasc eProfit monitor analysis shows the farm generated a gross margin of €596/ha. As detailed in Table 4, the farm achieved a relatively positive level of output of 64,800 kg liveweight or 913 kg/ha liveweight. This gave the farm a gross output value/ha of €2,284, and the level of output per livestock unit of 392 kg which has increased by increasing the average carcase weight of progeny. The variable costs were €1,689/ha and fixed costs were €754/ha. Improvements in silage quality and an earlier age of finish has resulted in the average animal consuming little concentrate over their lifetime also saving in meal annually. Significant increases in input prices for feed and fertiliser has had a significant impact on variable costs, even though the input level is low.

Through the inclusion of clover in grazing swards, it has reduced the system's dependence on chemical nitrogen. Contractor costs for the farm were €28,065 comprising of slurry spreading which was €6,125 due to the slurry being spread in Cones farm, which is 12 km from the home block. The phosphorus and potassium indexes are index 1 and 2 for P and K and silage was cut off this ground. Contractor Other was €6,077, which includes the cost of reseeding, lime and surplus bales being hauled from out farms. Going forward the silage will be harvested on the home block to reduce contractor charges for harvesting and slurry spreading. Fertiliser spreading was previously contracted out and it will be spread by farm staff going forward.

The Newford farm has a relatively high casual labour cost (full labour costs not included) a high loan interest payment and a high depreciation cost stemming from the farm implementing an interest-only payment on the stocking loan, working capital loan, overdraft facility, capital infrastructure loan, investment depreciation and the fact that all labour is hired.



Table 4. Newford 2022 profit monitor

| | Total | Per Ha |
|---------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Gross output(kg) liveweight | 64,800 | 913 |
| Gross output (€) | 162,205 | 2,284 |
| Variable costs | | |
| Purchased concentrate | 20,893 | 294 |
| Forage carried over | (3,020) | 42 |
| Straw forage | 8,568 | 121 |
| Fertiliser | 28,420 | 400 |
| Lime | 3,521 | 50 |
| Veterinary | 8,208 | 116 |
| AI/breeding | 7,117 | 100 |
| Contractor - silage cutting | 7,577 | 107 |
| Contractor - slurry spreading | 6,125 | 86 |
| Contractor - baled silage | 8,286 | 117 |
| Contractor - other | 6,077 | 86 |
| Seed & spray | 2,665 | 37 |
| Silage additive & polythene | 2,167 | 31 |
| Levies & transport | 2,058 | 29 |
| Sundry variable costs | 11,244 | 158 |
| Total variable costs €/Ha | 119,906 | 1,689 |
| Gross margin | 42,299 | 596 |
| Fixed costs | | |
| Hired labour | 12,000 | 169 |
| Mach running | 9,883 | 139 |
| Loan interest | 11,769 | 166 |
| Car (farm) | 1,131 | 16 |
| E.S.B (farm) | 1,560 | 22 |
| Depreciation | 10,365 | 146 |
| Repairs and maintenance | 2,345 | 33 |
| Insurance | 2,150 | 30 |
| Professional fees | 1,500 | 21 |
| Sundry fixed costs | 836 | 12 |
| Total fixed costs | 53,539 | 754 |
| Net profit | -11,240 | -158 |
| Fodder scheme | 1,000 | 14 |
| Premia: BDGP | 8,590 | 121 |
| Premia: BEEP | 6,050 | 85 |
| Net profit Including BGDGP beep | 3,400 | 48 |

Breeding performance

Some may be fazed by the thoughts of using 100% artificial insemination on a fragmented suckler farm. However, this was certainly not the case and in fact the direct opposite for Newford based on the breeding performance of the herd. The original 11 week breeding policy on the farm, involved six weeks of AI and running two stock bulls for a further five weeks to mop up. However, a new breeding regime was implemented in 2017, the stock bulls were sold and the farm moved to 100% AI.

The breeding season has also since been reduced to 10 weeks. It didn't make financial sense keeping two stock bulls on the farm, when they only needed to run with the cows for five weeks. Newford farm has found that with the correct management and nutrition cow fertility has been excellent with cows showing signs of heat activity three to five weeks post-calving.

Table 5. Comparison of 2015 and 2023 herd performance

| | 2016 | 2023 | Difference |
|---|------|------|------------|
| Replacement index cows (€) | 106 | 133 | 26 |
| Replacement index 1 st calvers (€) | 131 | 165 | 52 |
| Calving intervals (days) | 371 | 364 | -3 |
| Calves/cow/year | 0.93 | 0.96 | 0 |
| Heifers calves 22-26 months (%) | 100 | 100 | 0 |
| Six week calving rate (%) | 64 | 90 | 67 |

The farms breeding policy is simple yet very effective. Three vasectomised teaser bulls are purchased and arrive on farm the first week of April and are quarantined for three weeks. The vasectomised bulls are fitted with a Moolcall HEAT Collar and chin ball.

The use of these two heat detection methods and tail painting cows results in heats not being missed. Pre breeding heat checks are completed three weeks before insemination begins. This process helps identify cows or heifers that are not expressing heat activity and allows for further intervention and usually veterinary assistance is required. The benefits of completing three weeks pre breeding checks is certainly worth doing as for the past several years, the six week calving rate for the herd has been greater than 86%. Once a day AI has been completed for the last number of years and has proven very successful. Any cow or heifer in heat, is inseminated each day at 12 noon and if the same animal is still in heat later that evening or the following morning, it is inseminated again at 12 noon the next day. The 2022 scanning results were very impressive, with 54 cows holding to the first service, 13 cows holding to the second service and one cow holding to the 3rd service. Two sets of twins were also scanned.

Similarly, for the yearling heifers, 13 held to the first service, seven held to the second service and one heifer held to the third service. Implementing a strict 10 week breeding season has resulted in an average of 8% 'empty'

cows after this period and even though this figure may seem relatively high, this process removes non efficient cows from the herd, with only the top performing cows remaining. The replacement heifers calve down at 24 months of age (Table 5) without having any negative impact on lifetime performance of the cow in the herd or restricting mature cow bodyweight. Previously, angus and heifer calves were purchased from two dairy farms annually and contract reared and arrived to Newford farm, two months before expected calving date. Newford management team, decided the 2023 born replacement heifers would be reared on Newford farm, be artificially inseminated at 14 months and calve at 24 months. In order for a heifer to calve at 24 months, a number of weight targets must be achieved, table six outlines that heifers must be a minimum of 330 kg at time of insemination (Table 6).

Table 6. Replacement heifer calves weight targets

| Arrival weight | Rearing ADG | Weaning (9-10 weeks old) | ADG 1 st grazing season | Housing | ADG 1 st winter | Bulling (April 2024) |
|----------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 60kgs | 0.7kg | 95kg | 0.7kg | 220kg | >0.6kg/day | 330kg |

A strict sire selection criteria has been followed since the project commenced and has really benefited the herd in terms of calving ease and slaughter performance of the herd. Suitable bulls are identified using the ICBF active bull list, entering the information in Table 7 into the filter option, which produces a list of suitable sires.

Table 7. Criteria for selecting AI sires

| Criteria |
|---|
| 5 Star Terminal index (within & across) |
| < 8 % calving difficulty for mature cows |
| < 5.8 % calving difficulty for younger cows |
| > 70 % reliability calving difficult |
| > 35 Kg predicted carcass weight mature cows |
| >25 Kg predicted carcass weight young cows |
| > 1.86 on conformation |
| < 6 % calving difficulty for 1 st calvers (beef heifers) : 80% reliability |
| > 25 Kg predicted carcass weight |
| Cost of AI straw < €20 |
| >-3 days predicted transmitting ability age of slaughter |

The following bulls are being used for the 2023 breeding season in Newford: Ewdenvale Ivor (for heifers), Gstaad, Garnedd Nelson, Whitecliffe Orwell, Gaggin Power, Lapon, Birchpark Rufus, Grangwood Royal Oak (Table 8).

Table 8. List of bulls used and their details

| Sire | Breed | Beef cow calving difficulty (%) | PTA carcass (Kg) | PTA confirmation | Usage |
|--------|-------|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| LM2014 | LM | 2.5 | 28.9 | 2.45 | Maiden heifers |
| LM4851 | LM | 3.1 | 28.9 | 2.85 | Young cows |
| CH4321 | CH | 4.9 | 41.5 | 2.24 | Young cows |
| LM7713 | LM | 2.4 | 28.4 | 2.65 | Young cows |
| LM4366 | LM | 3.4 | 42.5 | 2.31 | Mature cows |
| CH6271 | CH | 4.8 | 48.4 | 2.06 | Mature cows |
| LM7404 | LM | 3 | 32 | 2.19 | Mature cows |
| CH8262 | CH | 7.2 | 41.7 | 2.37 | Mature cows |



Sustainability

Given Ireland's commitment to improving our carbon footprint throughout the sectors, Newford is committed to playing our part. A number of measures have been implemented on the farm in recent years. For example, in May 2021, eight hectares of grassland was over sown with white clover and a further 18 hectares was over sown in 2022. For the year ahead, an additional 12 hectares of grassland will be over sown with buddy white clover. Over sowing clover has not only reduced the farms dependency on expensive chemical fertiliser, but clover also acts as a nectar source for bees during summer. In Spring 2023, 220 metres of native hedging consisting of whitethorn and blackthorn was sown which will act as a corridor for wildlife and shelter for new-born calves. A small paddock in the farm yard was set aside in 2022 consisting of traditional grasses and flowers which are allowed to seed over the summer and in the near future we hope to establish an apple orchard consisting of native varieties. This paddock was grazed in September by weanlings to remove dead vegetation and let light to the base of the plants during the winter months and will be grazed again in September 2023.

In 2022, Newford farm joined the Future Beef Programme and Signpost Programme and with the help of the assigned programme advisors, Newford farm will demonstrate best practice regarding sustainable beef production by improving efficiency of the farm, improving biodiversity while increasing farm profitability.

Both programmes involve implementing a suite of measure to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, focused around: reducing age of slaughter, implementing a herd health plan, increasing the length of the grazing season, using protected urea, reducing chemical fertiliser use by 10 kg per hectare, increasing soil fertility and pH, making better use of slurry through spreading an increasing proportion of the slurry in the spring and using low emission slurry spreading equipment (LESS). Similarly, as part of ASSAP – Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme, Newford continues to demonstrate best agricultural practices to improve the quality of nearby water courses by implementing a number of measures – a targeted approach when spreading chemical fertiliser and organic manure, abiding by buffer zones when spraying herbicides prior to reseeding and when spreading fertiliser. Farmyard runoff is also diverted into slatted tanks instead of hard core areas around the farm yard.

As outlined earlier in this booklet, Newford has greatly reduced the slaughter age of steers and heifers to 18 and 21 months respectively, which has led to achieving great savings in terms of reduced silage consumption and the need to purchase expensive concentrate. This too has significant environmental benefits by reducing Newfords farm carbon footprint. The Teagasc roadmap identifies that the carbon footprint of suckler to beef systems nationally is 23.8 kg carbon dioxide per kg of carcass weight. However, Newford animals produced 20.4 kg carbon dioxide equivalent per kg carcass weight, which is 14.3% lower than the national average. Therefore, in 2021 Newford farm

emitted 655 t CO₂eq. By reducing the age of slaughter by two months of the 2021 born heifers and bullocks decreased Newfords farm emissions by 2.3% to 640 t carbon dioxide equivalent.

In December 2022, Teagasc installed an Eddy Covariance Flux Tower. The flux tower uses high resolution gas analysers to measure the instantaneous carbon dioxide concentration from the air and therefore can be used to measure soil carbon fluxes. The overall objective of this sustainability initiative will help Newford to increase its understanding on soil carbon fluxes and thus to determine whether the Newford soils are acting as sinks or sources as well as aiding the management of our soil carbon fluxes. In January 2023, Newford received a GreenFeed (C-Lock), which will measure enteric methane, hydrogen and carbon dioxide produced from Newford livestock.



Grassland management

Grazed grass is one of the cheapest forms of live weight gain, however it must be managed correctly throughout the growing season to ensure that quality and performance is maintained. There has always been a big emphasis on grassland management in Newford as high levels of production are required to keep quality grass ahead of livestock during the summer and shoulders of the year, while also producing enough silage for the winter months. A weekly grass walk is completed and information is uploaded to Pasturebase Ireland. When grass availability exceeds demand, surplus bales are made and similarly when demand is greater than growth rate, these surplus bales are fed back to help stretch grass supplies. Good grassland infrastructure is an essential element to maximise the total tonnage of grass grown and utilised. Water drinkers were strategically placed in the centre of every paddock on Newford farm which allows all paddocks to be temporarily split in two to optimise utilisation and back fencing to protect regrowth. The main rule implemented on Newford farm is to graze grass in three days and grow it in three weeks, resulting in optimum pre-grazing covers of 1200-1500 kg DM/ha. This method, ensures high leaf content of the sward, excellent graze outs and optimising animal performance. Total tonnage of grass grown on the farm has remained relatively consistent since the programme first began in 2015, despite the changes in loosing and gaining different land blocks and soil fertility issues. Optimising the use of slurry and farm yard manure to increase phosphorus and potassium levels, resulted in total tonnage of grass grown since 2015 been in the region of 12-14 t DM/ha. As previously outlined, optimum pre grazing covers, allows for better graze outs and utilisation, with annual utilisation rates of 80% been achieved - utilising 9.6 t to 11.2 t DM/ha.

One of the biggest changes seen on Newford farm is the reduction in chemical nitrogen spread on the farm. During 2015-2021, in the region of 170 kgs of nitrogen per hectare was spread annually but was reduced to 137 kgs in 2022. Newford has worked hard on establishing clover swards, by over sowing and including clover in grass seed mix when reseeding. Clover has the ability to fix between 50-200 kg of nitrogen per hectare annually. Since 2021, 26 ha of grassland has been over sown with white clover and it's planned to over sow a further 12 ha with Buddy white clover this year. Chemical nitrogen fertiliser application date and rate for grass only swards is outlined in Table 9 and Newford farm will continue to reduce its dependency on chemical nitrogen as the land containing clover swards continues to increase. It's important to note white clover does not have the ability to fix N for the first 12 to 18 months after sowing. Nitrogen fertiliser is important during this period to encourage growth and development. The benefits of a sward containing 20-25% clover, is outlined in Table 10, where the dependency on chemical nitrogen is greatly reduced.

Table 9. 2023 Fertiliser plan for grass only swards

| Month | Jan/ Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sept | Total |
|---------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| N kg/ha | 20 | 20 | 30 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 165 |

Table 10. Fertiliser plan for clover swards

| Month | Feb | Apr | May | Jun | Aug | Sept | Total |
|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| N kg/ha | 20 | 20 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 14 | 90 |

The last week of January or first week of February, usually sees the yearling beef heifers being turned out to grass. Early turn out of these heifers has proved very beneficial in recent years as it has resulted in significant reduction in labour, silage and slurry storage requirements, and has resulted in increased growth rates while reducing concentrate feed. Generally, 250 grazing days per annum has been achieved on Newford farm. Animals are turned out once ground conditions permit, yet management is flexible on rehousing these animals if ground conditions deteriorate as the time gained at grass has saved silage and also conditioned the swards for the grazing season ahead. Average daily gain for male and heifer calves at grass during their first grazing season has been in the region of 1.23-1.30kg/day from birth to weaning. Calves were weaned from their mothers generally from mid-late October. However, since 2019, weaning takes place during the second week of September and has proved very beneficial in terms of animal performance and grassland management. An earlier weaning date firstly, allows the weaned calves return to grass during generally better weather conditions, which reduces the possibility of pneumonia and weaned calves are more settled at grass. Secondly, this allows ease of management of the cows because if ground conditions deteriorate overnight, cows can easily be housed the following morning without any stress. This weaning policy also allows Newford to manage its autumn grazing much better as the weaned calves can be broken into smaller groups to reduce damaging paddocks, during wet weather. Second season grazing performance has been in the region of 0.8 – 1 kg for steers and heifers, respectively. Great progress has been made over the years finishing heifers of grass. A greater focus is now being placed on the possibility of finishing steers off grass and avoiding the second winter. Previous management practices have included, introducing concentrate at a rate of 2-3 kg/head per day to the most advanced steers from late August and this has resulted in these animals been fit for slaughter from early – mid October.

Health and safety practices in Newford

There is strong focus on health and safety in Newford Farm, with good planning and organisation of work tasks at the core of all management practices.

Some of the key areas where attention is placed to reduce the risk of accidents occurring

Risk assessment: A strong emphasis is placed on the farm health and safety statement. It is updated on a regular basis and all contactors and visitors are made aware of it. When hazards are identified there is a plan put in place to control the hazard without delay.

Animal handling: Good animal handling facilities help to improve productivity and safety but they also help to make tasks easier and more enjoyable. Cattle are always handled with care and restrained safely at Newford. Even the best built handling equipment will deteriorate over time so there is a strong focus placed on regular maintenance of handling equipment and farm fences at Newford.

Tractor safety: According to the Health and Safety authority tractors accounted for 55% of vehicle related fatalities on Irish farms over the past 10 years. The safe stop procedure is always implemented on the Newford farm. Reverse park safely, handbrake on, controls in park, lower all attachments, engine off and remove keys. There is also a strong focus on regular checks and maintenance of all farm vehicles, particularly brakes in addition to appropriate careful operation.

Calving season: One of the main high risk periods of the year in Newford is calving. Good calving facilities are in place, with well-designed calving gates. Calving equipment is stored close by and the pens are serviced by a calving camera. The camera helps to reduce the number of visits to the shed. Cows are always separated from calves or restrained when tagging occurs.

Farmers health: Newford farm is organised and managed to ensure there is a match between labour demand and labour availability. Sustainable levels of work and working hours facilitates a good work life balance and helps to maintain good mental and physical health. A major Irish study has indicated that farmers in the 'working age' (16-65 years) have a 5.1 times higher 'all cause' death rate than the occupational group with the lowest rate. The major causes of elevated death rate include cardiovascular disease (CVD), cancers and injuries. This research emphasises the importance of focusing on health. Take the time to have a health check.



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