

Tissue tags arriving on BDGP farms

Tissue tags for collecting DNA samples as part of this year's Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP)

have started arriving on farms. Each tag pack contains:

- The participating farmer's tissue tags for the 2015 programme.
- An instruction leaflet detailing how to apply the tags.
- A Freepost envelope for the return of the tags to the genotyping laboratory.
- A document containing frequently asked questions.

In addition to the BDGP tag pack, farmers will receive a BDGP tag report that contains some additional information to help them more quickly establish the animals that have been selected for tissue tagging as part of this year's programme, eg sex, breed and age of animal.

Farmers are encouraged to quickly undertake their genotyping requirement, as the closing date for receipt of the samples is 28 days after the receipt of the tags.

It is also important to note that participants should sample all of the requested animals in the tissue tag pack. However, if farmers receive tags for animals that have died, left the farm or are too dangerous to tag, then they should contact the BDGP help-line number (1850 625 626) to request

DNA kits for replacement animals. When selecting animals for genotyping, the priority was to help ensure that herds would have enough 4 and 5 star genotyped animals to meet the programme requirements. On that basis, the ICBF has targeted stock bulls, 4 and 5 star cows (up to those with 5 calves) and 4 and 5 star heifers that have not yet been genotyped, until the target number of animals has been reached.

Once these 4 and 5 star animals have been exhausted on individual farms, other animals, including those with more than five calves, may be requested. If a herd has young pedigree male and female animals, these have been selected first. Of the 350,000 animals that will be genotyped as part of this year's programme, almost 70% will be existing 4 and 5 star animals on farms.

The ICBF's plan is to have a system that allows participants select and de-select animals for genotyping next year. Unfortunately, it was not possible to have such a system in place this time around due to time constraints and the need to have farmers quickly complete their first year of genotyping.

At this stage, around 10,000 herds have received their BDGP tissue tag packs. The balance (some 19,000 packs in total) will be distributed over the next two to three weeks.

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One of Grattan Evans' best cows. This February 2008-born CHX cow has a Replacement Index of €127 (5 stars). She calved for the first time at 25 months. She has produced seven calves to date (one set of twins) with an average calving interval of 364 days. Her current calf is achieving an ADG of 1.4kg.

Q&A

What is genomics?

Genomics is the analysis of an animal's DNA to help predict how it will breed in the future. It will help to speed up the rate of genetic gain in the national suckler herd by identifying superior animals from a younger age.

How were animals selected for genotyping?

Priority was given to stock bulls and 4 and 5 star females. Where a herd has young pedigree animals, these were selected first. Animals have been selected to help ensure that herds will have enough 4 and 5 star genotyped animals to meet programme requirements.

I have received a tag for an animal that has left my farm - what should I do?

If you have received tags for departed (sold or dead) or dangerous animals, please contact 1850 625 626 to order replacements as soon as possible. Tags received for departed or dangerous animals should not be used.

FARMER FOCUS: GRATTAN EVANS

'It will help me to breed better stock'

Name: Grattan Evans, Delgany, Co Wicklow.

Farming system: Suckler to beef.

BDGP cow reference No: 49

4 or 5 star females: 21 cows; 30 heifers.

Stock bull or AI: Two stock bulls: Charolais and Limousin.

Replacement strategy: Up to now, buying in and breeding my own. Breeding own in future.

Why did you join the BDGP? My main reason was I feel that it's a positive programme and it will push me to pay more attention to breeding indexes, which will help me to breed better stock, have a more efficient herd and, in turn, increase profitability. Anything that challenges me to analyse my system, I see as a positive.

Do you feel it will deliver for the national suckler herd? It's a step in the right direction. I think that it will help bring the national herd forward through more comprehensive, reliable breeding information and by incentivising farmers to introduce more efficient breeding stock into their herds.

How did you find the BDGP Euro-Star report?

I found it clear and straightforward. I was very happy with it. I think that farmers now need to be given guidance on how to move their herds in the right direction to meet the programme targets.

What replacement strategy do you plan to implement in light of the scheme? I plan to breed all of my own replacements. I may have to change one of my stock bulls and replace him with a high Replacement Index bull (probably



Wicklow suckler farmer Grattan Evans.

Simmental) to mate with my highest Replacement Index cows.

Do you know much about genomics? I know the basics. I know that it involves taking DNA from an animal and using it to predict how that animal will perform in the future. It will help to take some of the guess work and risk out of breeding, which will be a big benefit.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

September: Genotyping tags, paper survey forms and any remaining BDGP Euro-Star reports arriving on farms.

Thursday 10 September @ 2pm: Teagasc/ICBF, BDGP and Euro-Star information open day on Billy and Niall Nicholson's farm, Crosshaven, Co Cork.

22-24 September: National Ploughing Championships, Ratheniska, Co Laois. Livestock demonstrations at the Irish Farmers Journal stand. Your BDGP questions answered at the DAFM stand.