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Understanding Euro-Star ratings

Recent data from the ICBF and Teagasc has indicated that 5-star cows leave an additional €120 more profit/progeny than an average suckler cow. To appreciate more fully how this benefit is derived for farmers, we must first understand the ICBF beef Euro-Star system.

The ideal suckler cow can be simply defined as a cow that calves each year (for many years), has a high-quality beef calf and has enough milk to rear that calf. Based on data recorded in the ICBF database (from farmers, marts and meat processors), ICBF is able to provide an assessment of the genetic merit of all suckler cows in the national herd. This assessment is termed a Euro-Star value. The Euro indicates the additional profit per progeny, while the star indicates the cow's ranking relative to other animals in the suckler cow population.

An animal ranking in the top 20% is deemed a 5-star animal, while an animal ranking in the bottom 20% is deemed a 1-star animal. Average animals (mid 20%) are deemed 3-star on the Euro-Star system. In the future, this Euro-Star value will also include genotype data, thereby providing an even more accu-

rate assessment of an animal's genetic merit.

Does the system work? Yes. Recent work by the ICBF and Teagasc has indicated that, on average, 5 star cows leave €120 more profit/progeny than average cows. This is through a combination of better performance across a range of key profit traits. Table 1 shows that on average 5-star cows, calved younger, had more progeny, had shorter calving intervals, lasted longer on farms, produced heavier calves at weaning and had animals that slaughtered at a younger age but with a higher carcass weight. So while farmers will raise concerns about ratings for individual cows (and bulls), a more complete analysis based on multiple cows on their own farms, or across many farms (as per Table 1), will clearly confirm the benefits of the Euro-Star system. So the strong advice to scheme participants is to have confidence in the Euro-Star system.

While the figures will be new to many, they are the culmination of almost 10 years of data, starting with the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme in 2008.

They will have a profound impact on the profitability of your farm in the future.

Table 1
Comparative performance of 5-star versus 3-star cows.

	5-Star cows	3-Star cows	5-Star versus 3-Star cows
Replacement Index (€)	€124	€64	
Number progeny to date	4.33	3.82	0.51 more progeny
Age 1st calving (days)	971	1000	29 days younger
Calving Interval (days)	399	409	10 days less
% Alive after seven years	72%	62%	10% alive
Growth rate of calves (kg/day)	1.17	1.09	0.08 kg/day
Carcass weight progeny (kg)	363	358	5 kg
Age at slaughter progeny (days)	752	784	32 younger

* Above analysis was based on 97,723 suckler cows that were born in 2008, in herds that joined BDGP

DATES FOR THE DIARY

9th Oct: Teagasc, BDGP Farm Event, Edward & Richard Butler's Farm, Danesfort, Co Kilkenny, 11am.

13th Oct: Teagasc National Beef Conference, Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone at 3pm.

12th-29th Oct: DAFM, ICBF, Teagasc BDGP Nationwide Information meetings. All meetings to start at 8 pm with DAFM & ICBF staff available from 4pm to deal with scheme queries.

► **Mon 12 Oct:** Gleneagle Hotel, Killarney

► **Wed 14 Oct:** Silversprings Hotel, Cork

► **Thur 15 Oct:** Brandon House Hotel, New Ross

► **Tue 20 Oct:** Raheen Woods Hotel, Athlone

► **Wed 21 Oct:** Welcome Inn Hotel, Castlebar

► **Thur 22 Oct:** Landmark Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon

► **Tue 27 Oct:** Ballykeesten Hotel, Limerick Junction

► **Wed 28 Oct:** Kilmore Hotel, Cavan

► **Thur 29 Oct:** Radisson Blue Hotel, Letterkenny

Three more venues may be announced for the start of November. See next week's page for updates.



Michael with one of the Kelly's best cows. This SI x cow sired by Harum (Huz) has a Replacement Index of €196 (5 stars - top 1%). She is seven years old, first calved at 24 months and has had six calves with an average calving interval of 371 days. She is due to calve again mid Jan 2016 to KJB.

Q & A

Q. How is a Euro-Star index generated for an animal? When a calf is born, provided its ancestry is recorded, it receives a Euro-Star index based on those of its parents. As data is recorded on an animal throughout its life – eg weights, docility, performance of progeny, etc – its index will start to change to reflect its own performance. The reliability figures show to what extent the animal's index is influenced by its own performance. Reliability figures will be explained in more detail next week.

Q. Are all beef cross heifers coming from the dairy herd automatically 4 or 5 stars? No. While these heifers receive a substantial boost in their index figures due to the milk effect of their dairy dams, it will not guarantee good fertility. Also, beef traits are negatively affected. The net effect is that only about half of the current first-cross beef animals from the dairy herd are 4 or 5 stars for replacement index.

FARMER FOCUS: MICHAEL KELLY

'Euro-Star indices can be powerful'

Name: Anne, Tom and Michael (son) Kelly, Kilenaule, Co Tipperary.

Farming system: Suckler to beef.

BDGP cow reference No: 77

4 and 5 star females: Cows 52; Heifers 39.

Stock bull or AI: 95% AI.

Replacement strategy: Breed all of our own.

Why did you join the BDGP? We have been using a lot of AI in the herd down through the years. As a result, the herd is already on course to meet the replacement targets for the scheme, so we were in no doubt that it made sense to join. Also, while the primary return will be the additional profit from better breeding, the financial supports are significant and cannot be ignored.

Do you feel it will deliver for the national suckler herd? I think it will. The extra information that will be provided through better data recording will increase the reliabilities on indexes.

Add to this the impact of genomics and it will make the Euro-Star indices a powerful tool for farmers to select breeding stock.

What replacement strategy do you plan to implement in light of the scheme? We plan to continue breeding our own replacements. Our strategy at the moment is to match the best cows to high Replacement Index bulls. We have been using maternal bulls for a number of years now and despite what many might think, this hasn't had any negative impact on our beef performance.

Do you use the Euro-Star indices when selecting AI bulls? We always do. The overall indexes (Replacement and Terminal) give a good indication as to what a bull will do. We also keep a close eye on the reliability of the figures. The more herds that participate in schemes like the



Michael Kelly

BDGP and the more data that's recorded, the more reliable the Euro-Star indexes will become.

Do you know much about genomics? A certain amount. I did a degree in science so I'd be reasonably familiar with the terminology. We've read a lot of the information provided by the ICBF and this has been helpful. Having more information on the genetic makeup of each animal and getting a better prediction as to how that animal will breed in the future has to be seen as a positive.

NEXT WEEK EURO-STAR RELIABILITIES