

Beef genomic evaluations deferred until August

The rollout of beef genomic evaluations by ICBF has been deferred until August. This decision was taken at an ICBF beef industry meeting which took place on Monday 25 April 2016.

The reason for the deferral was due to a desire from the wider beef breeding industry (AI companies, herdbooks and suckler beef farmers) to have genomics for female fertility included as part of the change. This work will not be available until August.

The alternative was to go with genomics for all traits except female fertility and add genomics for this final trait over the next two months. However, the meeting felt that it would be better for farmers and the industry if ICBF introduced all traits at once, so as to minimise the extent of changes that scheme participants will see in the short term.

In the meantime, advice from ICBF and Teagasc is that if scheme participants need to select heifers or bulls as part of the BDGP replacement strategy requirements, then they should continue to select animals with the highest Euro-Star ratings available from the current evaluations, based on the relevant index (Replacement or Terminal). While the majority of animals will not move significantly, both ICBF and Teagasc were strong in their advice that even after genomics is introduced, Euro-Star ratings for some animals will still change as more performance data is recorded in the database and as the genomic evaluation systems improve in the future.

One of the questions being asked by industry stakeholders over the past number of days has been: "Why was female fertility such a problem?"

Indeed analysis presented by ICBF at the meeting indicated that genomic evaluations have been computed for all 15 priority traits that make up the Euro-Star Replacement and Terminal Indexes. These are: (i) calving (calving difficulty%, gestation length and mortality); (ii) docility; (iii) beef performance (carcase weight, carcase conformation, carcase fat score, cull cow carcase weight, cow liveweight and feed intake); (iv) maternal milk (maternal weaning weight and cow milk score); and (v) female fertility (age at first calving, calving interval and cow survival).

The research teams are very confident that the particular problem with cow survival will be resolved in the coming weeks

For all of the traits, except cow survival, the new genomic evaluations were in line with expectations based on the changes introduced. The particular problem with cow survival is linked to the fact that it is a trait with a very low heritability (genetic effect on the trait) and, as such, any problems with data, pedigree and/or genotypes can have a more significant impact on the extent of changes to the Euro-Star Index.

That said, both the ICBF and Teagasc research teams are very confident that the particular problem with cow survival will be resolved in the coming weeks and that a full set of genomic evaluations for all traits will be available to the industry in August, with updated reports and online profiles being made available to farmers in September. We will be providing regular updates on the research work to the industry over the next two months, ahead of the August release date.



Eddie Lynch with one of his 5 star Replacement Index heifers on his farm near Gort, Co Galway.

KEY TIMELINE IN RELATION TO BDGP

The following are key months in relation to the BDGP for 2016.

Ongoing

→ 2015 payment upon verification of compliance.

May

→ Finalisation of list of herds involved in the BDGP scheme.

→ Tags sent to Autumn calving herds in BDGP.

July

→ Tags sent to Spring calving herds in BDGP.

August

→ Release of genomic proofs for AI sires.

September

→ Updated BDGP reports with new beef genomic evaluations sent to scheme participants.

October

→ Completion of BDGP Training by all scheme participants.

→ Completion of initial Carbon Navigator herd assessment by all scheme participants.

December

→ Commencement of 2016 payments.

All months

→ Completion of relevant BDGP data recording forms, as requested by DAFM.

FARMER FOCUS: EDDIE LYNCH

€uro-Stars helping breeding decisions

Name: Eddie Lynch, Cloondine, Gort, Co. Galway

Farming system: Suckler to weanling

4- and 5-star females: Cows: 21 Heifers: 12

Stock Bull or AI: Mix of AI and stock bull.

Replacement Strategy: Breed all my own.

Eddie Lynch runs a 40-cow suckler herd split between early autumn (July-August) and spring calving (February-April) in Kilbeacanty, near Gort in Co Galway. Eddie works off farm as a self-employed electrician.

Tell me about your farming system. I calve my autumn cows in July and August as I find that you have a strong calf going into the shed for the winter. Most of the cows are in-calf at this stage due to the good plane of nutrition they have enjoyed for the four to five months grazing pre-housing. The spring-calving cows calve indoors and are let out to grass as soon as ground conditions allow. My autumn-born bulls are sold in Gort mart as yearlings, where I aim for average weight of 480kg at time of sale. The bulls are weaned, leaving the shed in March and graze until being sold in August. The best of the spring-born bulls are sold in October and the remainder are castrated and sold as yearlings in spring. Any heifers suitable for breeding are kept and the remainder are sold as weanlings.

Has the BDGP had an influence on your breeding policy? I am a member of the Gort/Kinvara beef discussion group run by Teagasc and we have been exposed to the Euro-Star concept for a number of years now. Due to this, I have been studying the replacement figures and have been making my breeding decisions with the help



Eddie Lynch

of the Euro-Star Replacement Index. I currently have a Limousin bull with a Replacement Index of €103 (five stars) so most of his daughters should qualify for the programme and I may have excess heifers to sell. I also use AI and will be selecting bulls with high replacement values (€150+) to ensure that I have plenty of high Replacement Index heifers available going forward.

What do you plan to do with your lower Replacement Index females? By 2020, many of these lower index cows will have culled themselves for a variety of reasons. As I am using AI, I can mate some of these cows to high Replacement Index bulls to produce replacements, as they are performing well at the moment. I will also keep some of them if they last in the herd as only 50% of the reference female numbers are required to be 4-5 star by 31 October 2020. I won't panic as I have options either way with my bull and AI usage.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

→ 25 May 2016 - Newford Suckler Demonstration Farm open day, Athenry, Co Galway 2pm-7pm.

→ 15 September 2016 - Latest date to breed cows to have females born in time to meet the 31 October 2018 replacement requirement.