Understanding €uro-Star ratings

Recent data from the ICBF and Teagasc has indicated that during 2008, in herds that joined BDGP, the average beef calf born, provided its ancestry is recorded, it receives a Euro-Star index based on those of its parents. 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 support available will make the Euro-Star indices a powerful tool for farmers to select breeding stock.

Q. How is a Euro-Star Index generated for an animal? When a calf is born, its index is based on those of its parents. 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 support available will make the Euro-Star indices a powerful tool for farmers to select breeding stock.

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.

€uro-Star ratings

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 genotyping data, thereby providing an even more accurate 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Comparative performance of 5-star versus 3-star cows.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-Star cows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement Index (€)</td>
<td>€124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number progeny to date</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 1st calving (days)</td>
<td>971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calving interval (days)</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Alive after seven years</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth rate of calves (kg/day)</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carcass weight progeny (kg)</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at slaughter progeny (days)</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Q&A

**Q. How is a Euro-Star Index generated for an animal?** When a calf is born, its index is recorded. It receives a Euro-Star index based on those of its parents. 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 support available will make the Euro-Star indices a powerful tool for farmers to select breeding stock.

Do you use the Euro-Star indices when selecting AI bulls? We always do. The overall index will increase the reliabilities on indexes. Selecting AI bulls?

**Yes.** 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.

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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 support available 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.

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