

A guide to buying in replacements

About 40% of the replacements entering herds involved in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) are bought in. So what are the key considerations when purchasing suckler herd replacements and how can herd owners get access to Euro-Star data (to assist with purchasing decisions) in the future?

Key considerations. Given the scheme requirements, (20% four- and five-star replacement females in 2018 and 50% by 2020), the major consideration when purchasing in female replacements must be the Euro-Star replacement index of the animal in question. This is in addition to age, weight, breed and price.

On the issue of Euro-Star replacement index, the advice at this stage is to try and purchase animals that are in excess of €98 on their replacement index (ie, are five stars). The reason for this is that an animal's indexes will change over time, as more data becomes available (including the animal's genotype data). By purchasing animals that are five stars, herd owners are giving themselves some leeway, in the eventuality that the ani-

mal's index drops over time.

Another consideration is looking to purchase females from a range of sires (and preferably from a range of AI sires). By doing this, herd owners are further reducing the risk that the average index for the group of animals purchased will drop below the critical four star index cut-off (currently set at €74), regarding scheme eligibility.

Access to Euro-Star data.

In the short-term, the primary means of viewing this data is through the seller's BDGP report. Many herd owners are making these available prior to sale, either at marts or on the farm.

In addition, many marts and breed societies are now offering specialised replacement index sales, where the animal's replacement index is available in a sales catalogue.

Going forward, it is anticipated that this data will be made available on a routine basis through mart display boards, as well as through a dedicated "BDGP Mart Report", which will list all four- and five-star females entered for sale on a given day within the relevant mart. We expect each of these developments to be available over the coming months to herd owners.

65% of herds have returned tissue samples and animal surveys

While the level of return of tissue samples and survey data is very positive, DAFM is encouraging remaining herd owners to please return all material as soon as possible so as to ensure payments from December. Herd owners with any queries in relation to their scheme participation are encouraged to contact DAM or ICBF on 1850 625 626.

Tags issued to remaining herds

Tags were generated this week for about 1,200 herds that were "on-hold" pending some final issues regarding reference numbers, BVD status and/or pedigree queries. We expect these tags to be on participating farms within the next seven to 10 days. This leaves a balance of around 300 herds that DAFM and ICBF will be working through over the next number of weeks, as we look to resolve any outstanding issues.



Andrew Palmer, Lifford, Co Donegal, is a new entrant to the suckler-to-beef system.

Q&A

Q. How can I check the indices of heifers prior to purchasing them?

If purchasing heifers privately, the seller can provide you with the index details of the animals, provided they are members of HerdPlus and/or participants in the BDGP scheme. If purchasing through the mart, there is currently no way of knowing the index details of heifers unless the seller provides them at the sale. A project is currently under way between ICBF and the marts to get screens set up to display the Euro-Star details of heifers at mart sales.

Q. Are all beef x heifers coming from the dairy herd automatically 4 or 5 stars? A. No, this is not the case. While these heifers receive a substantial boost in their index figures due to the milk effect of their dairy dams, it will not necessarily guarantee good fertility and these same dairy dams are also negatively impacting these heifers on their beef traits. It is also important to remember that half of an animal's genetics come from the sire, so a lot will depend on the Euro-Star index figures of the beef bull used on the dairy cow. Each heifer's individual index should be looked at before purchase.

FARMER FOCUS: ANDREW PALMER

Indexes in marts will be a positive development

Name: Andrew Palmer, Lifford, Co Donegal.

Farming System: New entrant, suckler to beef.

BDGP Cow Reference No: 8.

4 and 5 Star Females: Cows: 4; Heifers: 16

Stock Bull or AI: Stock bull.

Replacement Strategy: Buy in.

Why did you join the BDGP?

The targets don't appear to be that difficult to meet and the financial aspect of the programme is pretty good so there was no question of not joining.

Do you feel it will deliver for the national suckler herd?

I think it can. There are a lot of cows out there that aren't performing up to scratch and maybe the programme will get people to take a closer look at these cows. Farmers are receiving financial support to improve the genetics in their herds which is hugely positive.

How do you source your replacement females?

I will probably keep buying in heifers. My first crop of heifers were drop LM x calves from the dairy herd which I reared myself. I have picked up some heifers in the mart but I had no idea at the time what their indexes were like. I was buying totally on visual appearance which is far from ideal.

Have you been using the Euro-Star Indexes when purchasing replacement heifers to date?

Not up to now. I suppose I was banking on the fact that because the heifers were out of dairy cows that they would all come up pretty high on the Euro-Star Index. Some of these have good indexes, but some do not. Having the Euro-Star information displayed in the marts will be a very



Andrew Palmer on his farm in Lifford, Donegal.

positive development when it comes. It will give farmers like me an extra tool when purchasing replacements.

What type of sires do you plan to use in your herd?

I plan to use a terminal sire on all of my cows and take all progeny to beef. I currently have a Charolais bull with a Terminal Index of €129 (5 stars within and across breed). He has Sesame (SXS) and Hermes (HME) in his back pedigree. I used a high Replacement Index Limousin bull by Ronick Hawk (RKH) on maiden heifers. I may keep some heifer calves as replacements.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

12th Oct – 5th Nov: DAFM, ICBF, Teagasc BDGP Nationwide Information meetings.

Thur 5th Nov: Seven Oaks Hotel, Carlow