Weight recording

Animal performance on beef farms is gauged by weight gain. Efficient, fast-growing animals that reach a desired sale/slaughter weight as early as possible are what is desired. In suckler herds, apart from a possible intensive finishing period, calves will generally express their highest growth rate in the period from birth to weaning. Milk is a major driver of calf growth; therefore, the milkability of the suckler cow is a key determinant in the weaning weight of a calf.

The Euro-Star Index system recognises this through the emphasis on milk in the Replacement Index (18%).

Measuring milkability

Identifying animals and bloodlines with a high genetic merit for milk is of critical importance in production. Weighing replacement females at the time of sale or slaughter allows you to project milk production.

Knowing the exact weights of their dams, sires and contemporaries gives you a clear insight into genetic performance. Cow milkability is important that farmers can focus on feeding and managing the benefit of these genetic traits.

The critical factor when weighing replacement females is when to do it. Weighing bulls at the age when you will use them in the herd is the key. If you are feeding and selling, then giving a more accurate reflection of cow milkability.

When to weigh

The most critical time frame in which to weigh suckler calves is between 150 and 250 days of age (five to eight months). Weighed recorded calves in this period best reflect the genetic evaluation process.

How to weigh

Weighing is a job I look forward to every year. I started weighing about 5 or 6 calves at the age of 12 weeks, and it’s been a regular occurrence ever since. We develop a routine for weighing stock, with a set time each month, and it’s important to be consistent. Weighing stock, then it will be a success.

Getting animals weighed

Some farmers have their own weighing scales on farm. It is important that farmers transfer these DIY weights to the ICBF database. This can be done by using MyHerdPlus or a farm software package. This allows a farmer to properly analyse the weights of animals by assessing ADGs, group averages, etc.

Also it means that these weights can be used in the genetic evaluation process. Where access to a scales is not possible, you can avail of the ICBF weight recording technician service. All weights are sent to the ICBF database automatically via a handheld and a report is generated. There is a €60 callout fee which covers the weighing of up to 15 animals. For more information, go to the weight recording section under services at www.icbf.com or call 1850 650 300.

Benefits of weighing

There are two main benefits to weighing stock on farm:

1. The first and most obvious one is management. Knowing the exact weight of stock allows you to project sale/slaughtering dates, performance and condition of animals.

2. Weighing animals by weight, dose at the sale/slaughter dates, and comparing their weights allows you to project milk production.

One of Donal’s top-performing cows with her current calf. This seven-year-old SIZ cow has a Replacement Index of €172 and has produced six calves with an average calving interval of 359 days. She currently weighs 665kg. Her current calf is 4.5 months old and weighs 265kg (1.62 ADG). Her 2014 calf weighed 450kg at weaning (1.56 ADG), which means the cow weaned 68% of her own bodyweight. This calf was recently slaughtered as an U16 month bull with a carcass weight of 420kg. The cow is sired by the AI sire Derrough Samual (DRU).