5-star cows deliver on BETTER farms

This is the clear outcome from analysis of the recently concluded Phase 2 of the Teagasc/Irish Farmers Journal BETTER farm Beef Programme (2012-2015). Over 3,000 cows calved down in the 30 herds producing over 8,500 progeny over the course of the four year programme.

As part of the analysis, the cows were divided up by their Replacement Index star rating (across breed) and compared on:
- Age 1st Calving
- Calving Interval
- Average Daily Gain
- Progeny of 1st Calving
- Average Daily Gain of progeny (ADG).

As Table 1 outlines, the 5 star Replacement Index cows outperformed their herd mates across all of the key maternal traits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Star Rating</th>
<th>Cows</th>
<th>Avg. Rep Index (€)</th>
<th>Age 1st Calving (Days)</th>
<th>Avg. Calving Int. (Days)</th>
<th>ADG of Progeny (kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Star</td>
<td>1293</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Star</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Star</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Star</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Star</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference 1-5 Star</td>
<td>€126</td>
<td>-58 Days</td>
<td>-11 Days</td>
<td>+0.21 kg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Performance of cows by Euro-Star rating on key maternal traits

ADG of Progeny
The milk performance of suckler cows is measured through the weight gain expressed by their calves. While only a small percentage of suckler calves are weight recorded nationally each year, weighing was carried out routinely in the programme herds, which ensured that there was sufficient weight data for analysis.

Progeny of 5 star cows had an ADG of 1.24 kg, while the progeny of 1 star cows had an ADG of 0.3 kg, a difference of 1.24 kg around 250 kg for an ADG of 0.7 kg. This is a significant improvement over the national average of 0.21 kg.

The terminal index of the bulls mated to cows across all of the star ratings was 0.1 kg, which is significant as those outlined in Table 1 are found in a relatively large population of animals across many herds and many different management systems, then it is fair to say that genetics is undoubtedly a factor.

The high Replacement Index 5 star cows expressed the best performance across all of the key maternal traits outlined. The Beef Data & Genomics Programme is providing farmers with a financial incentive to introduce more of these high Replacement Index females into their herds in order to help them to improve efficiency and in turn increase output and profitability.

FARMER FOCUS: ANNIE KILGALLON, MULLAUNS, BALLINA, MAYO
Stars aplenty in north Mayo

Name: Annie Kilgallon, Mullauns, Ballina, Co. Mayo
Farming system: Suckler to weaning
Four- and five-star females: Cows: 13 Heifers: 24
Stock bull or AI: 100% AI
Replacement strategy: Breed all at once

Tell me about your farming system?
“Two twenty five cow spring calving herd calving from February to mid-April. Male progeny are sold at weanling. Suckler to dairy.”

What do you plan to do with your surplus heifers?
“These will be sold at Mayo Sligo Mart at the next special breeding sale for 4/5 star replacements. We use AI to get the most value.”

What do you plan to do with your surplus heifers?
“Two star heifers will be sold at Mayo Sligo Mart at the next special breeding sale for 4/5 star replacements. We use AI to get the most value.”

NOMINATIONS: The first BDGP special breeding sale for 5 star replacements is being held at Mayo Sligo Mart on the 1st October. The 5 star heifers will be sold with bloodlines from top 5 star males and a high Replacement Index. They will be sold to farmers across Ireland who want to improve their herd genetics. The sale will be an important event for the Irish suckler beef industry and will provide an opportunity for farmers to improve their herd genetics.”

25th May 2016 - Newford Suckler Demonstration Herd National Open Day, Athenry, Co Galway, 2pm-7pm. For more info go to www.newfordsucklerbeef.ie.