

Mart screens to display Euro-Star Indexes

The announcement of the Mart Modernisation Scheme this week by Minister for Agriculture Michael Creed is a significant development for the Beef Data & Genomics Programme (BDGP). The scheme will provide financial assistance, in the form of a grant, to aid marts in the introduction of new display screens which will see genetic indexes (Euro-Stars) being displayed at conventional day-to-day sales for the first time.

The average replacement rate in Irish suckler herds is approximately 18-20%. Of the 945,000 suckler cows calved in 2015, 170,511 (18%) were first calvers. 68,974 (40%) of these first calvers were bought in. 45,132 (65%) of these bought-in heifers were purchased through marts. It is clear from this statistic that many suckler farmers source some, or all, of their replacement heifers from outside of the herd, with the majority being purchased through marts.

The introduction of Euro-Star Indexes to mart display screens will prove to be invaluable to suckler beef farmers purchasing replacement heifers through mart sales.

Where these farmers had to rely solely on the visual appearance of an animal in the past, they will now have access to important genetic information, such as the Replacement Index and Star Rating, which will allow for more informed selection of future breeding stock. Of course, it will also be significant for those selling high Replacement Index females once indexes become available on screens.

What will be displayed?

The new screens will include all currently displayed data, such as lot number, date of birth, TB status, etc, as well as incorporating the Replacement Index of the animal (€ value) and the star rating (1-5 star).

For dairy animals, the EBI as well as the milk and fertility sub-indexes will be shown. Animals will have to meet certain predefined criteria in order for

their indexes to be displayed, such as:

➔ Heifers must meet the BDGP 4 and 5 star Replacement Index requirement.

➔ Heifers must be sold from herds that are participating in the BDGP and/or signed up to the ICBF HerdPlus service.

Grant details and application procedure

The scheme will provide 40% grant aid up to a maximum of €4,000 (maximum €10,000 total spend). Each livestock mart premises can only apply for grant aid on one screen. Full details of the scheme as well as the application form can be found on the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine website at www.agriculture.gov.ie.

New female search facility

In the coming weeks, a new facility will be made available on the ICBF website which will allow farmers to check the Euro-Star Indexes of females. Similar to the existing bull search, a farmer will be able to enter the tag number of a heifer and access its index details. As it will most likely be autumn before many marts are in a position to display indexes in the sales ring, this facility will prove useful for farmers currently looking to purchase heifers through the mart.

Only females being sold from herds participating in the BDGP and/or signed up to the ICBF HerdPlus service will be eligible to be accessed through this facility.

2016 tags

Letters are currently being sent to BDGP herds detailing the animals which have been selected for genotyping for 2016. Farmers who wish to change some of the pre-selected animals now have the option to do so.

This facility is available online and the letter outlines how this can be done. Farmers have until Sunday 5 June to change animals. Tags should be arriving on farms from the start of July.



Derek Beattie, Coolroe, Tinahely, Co Wicklow, with his beef herd.

Q&A

Q. When will the new mart display boards be up and running?

This will vary from mart to mart. A small number of marts have already set up new display screens which have the Euro-Star Index information incorporated. Realistically though, it will be autumn 2016 before the screens will be in mainstream use in marts.

Q. What can I do in the meantime to check the indexes of animals prior to purchase?

Where you are buying heifers privately you will have to get the index details from the seller. Once the new female search is launched, you will be able to check the index details online once you have the relevant tag numbers. Marts will soon have a catalogue facility which will allow them to print off sheets listing all of the 4- and 5-star heifers available for sale on the day. This will allow farmers to take a look at heifers in the penning area before they are sold.

FARMER FOCUS: DEREK BEATTIE

A balanced cow is what is needed

Name: Derek Beattie, Coolroe, Tinahely, Co Wicklow

Farming System: Suckler to store/beef

4 and 5 Star Females: Cows: 13; Heifers: 14.

Stock Bull or AI: Stock Bull

Replacement Strategy: Breed all my own.

Derek Beattie runs a suckler herd in Tinahely, Co Wicklow. Derek describes his farming system to us and his experience of the BDGP to date.

Tell me about your farming system

Currently cows are calving in spring and autumn but I plan on moving to 100% spring calving. I just find that there is a lot of labour and expense associated with the autumn calvers. More compact calving will reduce the labour required and also reduce the number of stock groups on the farm. I have two Limousin stock bulls and they are used across the whole herd. One bull has a Replacement Index of €44 (2 star) while the other has an index of €119 (5 star). AI doesn't suit the farm here as land, while not spread over a big area, is divided by some busy roads. I sell some of the progeny as stores and take the rest through to slaughter.

How has the BDGP had an influence on your breeding policy?

I'm not going to have to change anything dramatically. I breed all of my own replacements and this is what I intend to do going forward. I tend to change my stock bulls every few years to prevent inbreeding. I will be changing the lower Replacement Index bull later this year and I will replace him with a high Replacement Index bull. Calving ease is also very important on this farm.



Derek Beattie on his farm in Wicklow.

How did you find the BDGP training course?

I found it easy to understand. Most of what was covered was pretty straightforward. The scheme will bring positives for the national suckler herd. One thing that I feel we need to be mindful of is that we don't end up overly sacrificing growth traits in the chase to improve maternal traits. While I would be the first to admit that a suckler cow must have milk and fertility, she must also transmit decent growth traits to her calf. From my understanding of the Replacement Index, it rewards a balanced cow and this is what I think we need to strive towards.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

➔ 5th July 2016 - Beef 2016 - Teagasc Grange, Dunsany, Co Meath. For more information go to <http://www.teagasc.ie/events/2016/20160705.asp>