

Beef Carbon Navigator

The Beef Data & Genomics Programme (BDGP) which forms part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme involves funding of €300m in the period to 2020. Along with addressing widely acknowledged weaknesses in the maternal genetics of the Irish suckler herd, the programme will place Ireland at the forefront of climate-friendly agriculture and further the green image of our beef production, which has served us well in high-value markets around the world. Measuring the carbon footprint of each participating herd through defined metrics, such as calving interval, length of grazing season and slurry application, is key to implementing changes to improve efficiency in such areas. The Carbon Navigator will play a key role in this.

WHAT IS A CARBON NAVIGATOR?

The Carbon Navigator is an online farm management package developed by Bord Bia and Teagasc. It quantifies the environmental gains that can be made on each applicant's farm. It is a very useful and simple tool which allows an individual farmer to look at changes which can be made on their farm in areas such as the length of the grazing season and average calving interval.

It then illustrates what that change would mean in terms of reduced GHG emissions from the herd and the increased profitability associated with such a change. It has been developed to promote the uptake of carbon-efficient farming practices and demonstrates, for each scheme participant, the level of emissions at farm level while also setting indicative targets for reducing them.

HOW WILL THIS BE DONE?

Each BDGP participant must complete the Carbon Navigator by 31 October this year.

The first completion of the Carbon Navigator must be undertaken in conjunction with an approved adviser. There is no farmer cost to completing this as the cost is covered separately under the RDP and so advisers are paid directly by

the Department.

Farmers participating in the programme should now make contact with a qualified adviser to assist them in the completion of their Carbon Navigator for 2016. The list of qualified advisers is available on the Department of Agriculture website www.agriculture.gov.ie/beefschemes in the document entitled "Advisers Qualified to Complete Carbon Navigators".

Once a farmer has contacted a trained adviser from the approved list, that adviser will assist the farmer in the online completion of the navigator in 2016 (before 31 October). The adviser will also provide farmers with an overview of the benefits associated with reaching the individual targets set out in the navigator.

WHAT INFORMATION IS REQUIRED?

In 2016, each participant is required to provide details that highlight how a farm's GHG emissions can be reduced. The areas covered are as follows:

- Length of grazing season.
- Age at first calving.
- Calving Interval.
- Animal weight gain.
- Nitrogen efficiency.
- Slurry management.

The report compares an individual's farm performance with other similar farms and highlights the potential impact on income and GHG emissions of reaching the targets set. For example, by turning animals out to grass two weeks earlier in spring, a farmer will save on feed costs and see an increase in animal performance by getting more grass into the diet.

Following on from the initial completion in 2016, applicants must submit data annually to allow for an update of the Carbon Navigator. This data will be submitted via survey forms issued by the ICBF to each applicant on an annual basis.

If you have any queries regarding the completion of the Carbon Navigator you should contact the Beef Schemes section of the Department at 076 1064423.

Additional information on the Carbon Navigator for both farmers and advisers can be found on the Department's website at www.agriculture.gov.ie/beefschemes/



Tommy Holmes pictured with one of his Aberdeen Angus replacement females on his farm outside Ballina, Co. Mayo. Tommy recently completed a Carbon Navigator with his Teagasc advisor as part of the BDGP requirements."

Q&A

Q. When must I have the Carbon Navigator completed by? Each BDGP applicant must have completed the Carbon Navigator by 31 October 2016.

Q. Who do I contact to complete the Carbon Navigator and how much will it cost me? You will have to complete the Carbon Navigator with an approved agricultural adviser. Approved advisers have completed a specific training course for this. A list of approved advisers is available on the Department of Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.ie/beefschemes/. You will not have to pay any money to the adviser. DAFM will pay the advisor directly.

Q. Will I receive notification, like I did for the training course, of when I am to meet my adviser to complete the Carbon Navigator? No, the onus is on the applicant to contact an approved adviser to make an appointment to complete the Carbon Navigator. You are encouraged to do this as soon as possible.

FARMER FOCUS: TOMMY HOLMES, BALLINA, CO MAYO

"Carbon Navigator identified areas for improvement"

Name: Thomas Holmes, Tullysleva, Ballina, Co. Mayo

Farming System: Suckler to beef

4 and 5 Star Females. Cows: 9 Heifers: 8

Stock Bull or AI: 100% AI.

Replacement Strategy: Breed all my own.

Tommy Holmes runs a 15-cow suckler herd outside of Ballina, Co Mayo. As part of the BDGP requirements, Tommy recently completed a Carbon Navigator with his local Teagasc adviser. We ask Tommy about his experience of the Carbon Navigator and the areas for improvement that it identified.

What is the breeding strategy for your herd?

I try to produce good-quality maternal females first and foremost, whilst also trying to maintain good growth and carcass traits in males for slaughter. My calving season runs generally from August through to Christmas. I use 100% AI and it has been working well for me. My best females are selected as replacements to calve down at 24 months and surplus females are slaughtered. I don't believe in selling on females that I don't consider good enough for breeding in my own herd. The males are slaughtered as bulls preferably at U16 months.

You recently completed a Carbon Navigator. How did you find it?

I didn't know too much about it beforehand, but the adviser was a big help. He asked me the relevant questions and I provided the answers as accurately as I could. We were able to get a lot of the data from my ICBF HerdPlus account. I can see the benefit of sitting down with an agricultural



Tommy Holmes

adviser to do the Carbon Navigator as I would have found it difficult to complete on my own and to interpret the results afterwards.

What were the main areas for improvement identified by the Carbon Navigator?

There were three main areas identified really. The first one was to try to extend the grazing season by about three weeks. I'll try to get cattle out 10 days earlier in spring and house 10 days later in autumn. Of course, weather can play a big part in this. The second was to increase my calves/cow/year figure. Improved management and genetics should achieve this. The third was to try and utilise all of my slurry in the spring. I spread more slurry this past spring than I had done in previous years and I could see a big difference in grass growth as a result.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

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